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Three Positive Approaches to School Discipline:
Are They Compatible with Social Justice Principles?
Laura Oxley and George W. Holden

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Author contact: Laura Oxley, Psychology in Education Research Centre, Department of Education, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK. Email: lo590@york.ac.uk;
George W. Holden, Department of Psychology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.
Email: gholden@smu.edu.

**Three Positive Approaches to School Discipline:
Are They Compatible with Social Justice Principles?**

Abstract

Aims: Maintaining order is a fundamental task for teachers in the classroom. Historically, some form of punishment has been the common response to undesirable behaviour. However, over the past two and a half decades, a different approach to classroom management, sometimes labelled “positive discipline”, is being increasingly adopted by schools. This approach focusses on positive reinforcement rather than punishment, proaction rather than reaction, and collaboration rather than top-down decision-making. As such, there is resonance with social justice principles.

Method: Three prominent positive approaches to classroom behavioural management are identified: Restorative Practices (RP); Positive Behavioural Intervention and Support (PBIS); and Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS). The three approaches are described, compared, and evaluated. The extent to which they reflect an orientation toward social justice is then considered.

Findings: Inherent in all three models is a more theoretically-informed approach to behaviour management in schools. The models share a number of similarities, such as a collaborative problem-solving approach and reducing or eliminating traditional punishments. Several differences between the three approaches are also identified.

Limitations: There are differing amounts of evidence for each approach and this is also gathered from different contexts. For example, PBIS is more widely used in the United States than in the United Kingdom. This makes it difficult to conduct a direct comparison between the three models.

Conclusions: Although there are differences between the models, all three have evidence about their effectiveness and adopt an orientation to behaviour management that is considerably more socially just than the traditional, punishment-oriented approach.

Keywords: school discipline; social justice; restorative practices; positive behavioural

interventions and supports; collaborative problem solving

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**Three Positive Approaches to School Discipline:
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Challenging behaviour in the classroom is a significant issue for classroom teachers. Traditionally, the common response to such behaviour in schools around the world has been imposition of some type of punishment. Corporal punishment in many non-European countries continues to play a prominent role in school management approaches (Burchell, 2018; Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, in press; Middleton, 2008). Other customary types of punishments include detentions and suspensions or exclusions (also called expulsions). Many of these punishments are in violation of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and at odds with a social justice orientation.

For the purposes of this paper, punishment refers to a response to undesirable behaviour which is intended to be unpleasant in some way and aims to deter repetition of the same behaviour. Disruptive behaviour refers to behaviour which is undesirable in a school environment and takes the teacher's attention away from the main task of teaching. This covers a wide range of behaviours. These can range from minor infractions, such as talking at inappropriate times, to considerably more serious offenses, such as threats and physical assaults.

Although there is no agreement on a single set of principles of social justice, four key aspects are dignity, access, equity, and participation. The use of punishment is generally incompatible with these principles as it is an action primarily intended to cause a negative experience for the recipient. This does not align with the principle of upholding dignity, particularly when the punishment involves causing feelings of shame or guilt. School punishment is imposed by school personnel, thus negating any opportunity for participation. Access and equity are also not reflected in the current use of punishment in school, with certain

groups of children being more likely to receive punishments and be denied full access to their education than others.

Over the past two and a half decades, schools in England, the United States, and a number of other countries are increasingly implementing approaches to behaviour management in schools that have a greater emphasis on, or at least are resonant with social justice principles. These approaches offer a different framework for managing challenging behaviour rather than relying on the threat or use of punishment. A hallmark of the approaches involves working with children to reach mutually agreeable solutions to behaviour issues consonant with the social justice principles of dignity, participation in decisions that govern their lives, and equal access to education.

Educational psychologists (EPs) provide essential support to school staff in making the move to a more socially just way of addressing challenging behaviour. With their skills and expertise, EPs can play a key role in ensuring that implementation of a new approach is successful. Even in the absence of whole school commitment to an alternative approach being adopted, the role of an EP presents opportunities for working with school staff to support children for whom the current system is not working in a more sustainable and socially just way. At the minimum, raising awareness of these approaches among key school staff and increasing their knowledge is something that educational psychologists can do in the course of their daily work.

This paper is an examination of this approach to classroom behaviour management and how the approach relates to social justice. Three of the most widely-used positive discipline programs will be discussed, all of which fall under the umbrella of a more socially just system of behaviour management. The programs are: Restorative Practices (RP); Positive Behavioural

Intervention and Supports (PBIS); and Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS). The evidence for these programs comes primarily from schools in England and the United States. However, the issues raised are broadly applicable. The move towards a more socially just system of behaviour management in schools is also emerging in many other countries. For example, Scotland is arguably further along in this transition than England, with RP being widely promoted in Scottish schools (Education Scotland, 2020).

The move towards an alternative approach to behaviour in schools represents a significant change in the way teachers address behavioural issues in the classroom. Imposing punishment in response to undesirable behaviour has been the norm throughout history. This is highlighted by the very fact that different approaches to behaviour are referred to as “alternatives”. Punishment of a child’s infraction is an accepted and popular approach to behavioural management. Depending on the type of punishment used, it can be relatively quick and inexpensive to employ, and schools can readily create policies that link transgressions with particular punishments.

The data on school exclusions in England are telling. Over a recent five-year period, England has seen a 60% increase in school exclusions. By the 2017-2018 academic year, an average of 42 children a day were excluded (Partridge, Strong, Loblely et al., 2020). But exclusions are not meted out equally. In the 2016-2017 academic year, boys were three times more likely to be excluded from schools than girls (Department for Education (DfE), 2018; Gibbs, 2018). Children from a low socio-economic-status background, (as measured by eligibility for free school meals) were four times more likely to be excluded than other children (DfE, 2018; Gibbs, 2018). Those from certain ethnic minorities, such as Black Caribbean-heritage children, were over three times more likely to be excluded than children of other ethnic groups (DfE, 2018; Partridge et al., 2020). Another high-risk group are children with special

educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Children identified as having SEND were six times more likely to be excluded than other children (DfE, 2018). These risk categories can be additive. One particularly stark finding revealed “if you were a Black African-Caribbean boy with special needs and eligible for free school meals you were 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded from a state-funded school than a White girl without special needs from a middle-class family” (Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2012, p. 9).

Data from the use of corporal punishment in schools in the United States echo these same risk-categories. Nineteen states continue to allow corporal punishment of children in state-funded (public) schools. The form the corporal punishment takes is typically hitting a child’s buttocks with a wooden paddle (“paddling”). There exist sharp disparities in who gets hit in school. African American boys and to a lesser extent, African American girls are the most likely to be punished in this fashion. Children with developmental disabilities are also disproportionately paddled (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

Alternative Approaches to Punitive Responses

By moving away from exclusions, paddling, and other punishment-based responses, schools can work toward redressing these disparities. A more socially just approach can be achieved by adults working together with the learner. Over the past thirty years, a number of universal, whole-school prevention interventions have been developed, including the Child Development Project (Battistich, Schaps, Watson et al., 1996), Project Achieve (Knoff, 2000), and Comprehensive Behaviour Management System (Rosenberg & Jackman, 2003). These and other school prevention programmes differ on such dimensions as theoretical orientation, activities, and targeted behaviours (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton et al., 2009). However, they are

all designed to alter the school environment to influence children's behaviour and academic performance without a reliance on punishment.

Three of the more prominent, evidence-based alternate school management models incorporate, whether intended or not, social justice orientations. The next section of this paper will describe these three programs: Restorative Practices (RP); Positive Behavioural Intervention and Support (PBIS); and Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS). Each program will be considered, along with a critical description and brief evaluation.

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices (RP) is perhaps the most common alternative approach to traditional forms of behaviour management in schools. Originating from within the criminal justice system, it aims to promote positive behaviour within the school (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). This approach is also known as Restorative Justice.

The RP model is centred on building and maintaining relationships, with the intention of repairing any harm that has been caused by some form of undesirable behaviour. The model aims to make both the victim, if there was one, and the offender whole. Reparation involves a collaborative process, whereby all parties involved come together to agree on a way forward.

Restorative Practices in schools are implemented in a variety of ways, ensuring flexibility so that the approach remains age appropriate and enabling all children involved to participate in the process as much as they are able. There is also a spectrum of responses that can be taken, depending on the seriousness of the behaviour. For serious incidents, such as assault, a full restorative conference may be necessary. A conference involves considerable preparation and a skilled facilitator to conduct the meeting. However, for less serious incidences, such as a conflict between friends or minor classroom disruptions, teachers can lead the restorative approach

themselves. This is accomplished by engaging all the children involved and following collaborative as well as empathic principles.

The RP process is not only a positive way to solve school problems. The approach also has important pedagogic utility. By modelling how to address problems through talking about feelings and encouraging empathic responses, it helps children to build emotional awareness and problem-solving skills. These skills, rarely taught explicitly in schools, may be especially helpful to those children who have not have experienced empathic caregiving in their homes (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Consequently, exposure to this approach provides the opportunity to learn important life-skills.

The evidence indicates that RP are successful in various ways. Acosta et al. (2019) conducted an evaluation of RP as a whole school intervention designed to build a supportive environment. Based on self-reports from children at the school, the study found that RP had improved the perceptions of the school climate, connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills, while reducing the frequency of cyberbullying victimisation.

Another effectiveness study investigated the impact of RP implementation in the classroom (Stowe, 2016). It was found that introducing RP improved relationships, promoted empathy, and encouraged teachers and children to work together. Children also gained a greater sense of ownership over their own behaviour. However, Stowe (2016) cautioned that the implementation of RP is a process that necessitates repeated, structured, and reflective engagement in order to be successful.

To successfully implement RP in a school, staff must receive high quality training. Without sufficient instruction, adherence to the model is unlikely and therefore it is less likely to be effective. This unintended consequence occurred in Scotland, as a consequence of the rush to

adopt RP nation-wide. Teachers reported a lack of training and insufficient preparation for proper implementation of the model. Consequently, some teachers indicated the model is ineffective and caused in even more disciplinary problems than prior to its implementation (Seith, 2019).

When there is fidelity to the model, the evidence reveals that it can have positive effects, both socially and academically. In studies of RP in English schools, Flanagan (2014) reported a decrease in school exclusions, a reduction in absenteeism, and an increase in achievement scores in both English and math. School staff report positive reactions to RP. In a case study of one inner-London primary school Bevington (2015) found that the six staff respondents expressed a realistic yet hopeful view of the program. They recognized that conflicts in school were inevitable but viewed the RP approach as far more constructive and beneficial for children's development than the traditional orientation to school discipline. Furthermore, the RP approach was more compatible with the school's values than a punitive orientation.

As beneficial as the RP model is, it does come with costs. The need for fidelity to the RP model highlights a major implementation cost. Considerable time and resources are necessary for adequate training. Using RP to manage disruptive behaviour is undeniably more time consuming at the outset than traditional punitive responses. It also requires more effort and thought by the adults involved. However, the evidence indicates that if implemented properly with a whole school commitment, there can be a sustainable reduction in behaviour problems and school exclusions (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). With the emphasis on listening to the viewpoints of all parties and working collaboratively to resolve the conflicts or problems, RP offers schools an approach to child management that is consonant with social justice principles.

Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports

A second alternative model to traditional behaviour management in schools, and one that is widely used in the United States, is school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). This approach is a noncurricular, universal prevention program designed to modify the school environment through the creation of systems and procedures that promote positive behaviour and behavioural change in children, teachers, and staff. Its theoretical approach was developed from behavioural, social learning, and organisational behaviour principles (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

The PBIS model comprises seven fundamental features: 1) a leadership team to implement the programme; 2) a behavioural support coach (e.g., school psychologist) for on-site technical assistance; 3) establishment of positively-framed behavioural expectations (e.g., “be respectful, responsible, ready to learn”); 4) defining and teaching the expectations; 5) establishing a reward system for positive behaviour; 6) staff and teacher agreed upon system for responding to behavioural violations; and 7) a system to collect, analyse, and utilise disciplinary data (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans et al., 2008).

The PBIS model contains multiple elements and three prevention tiers (primary, secondary, & tertiary). The primary tier is universal prevention. This is the core of PBIS and is provided to all children. The secondary tier is aimed at targeted groups of children who need additional support. This tier focuses on helping the children to improve specific skills. Working with a group of children is designed to ensure that there is an increased number of opportunities for practise and feedback, as well as to attain a high level of intervention efficiency. The third tier is the most intensive support offered in PBIS. Because it is an individualised programme of support, it is resource intensive. Goals from this tier of intervention often focus on both academic and behaviour support. The tiered system of PBIS means that support can be offered on a

continuum, with universal support being available to all and then additional and more intensive interventions available when indicated by the needs of the child.

In the United States, more than 26,000 schools now use PBIS (www.pbis.org). Given its popularity and with more than 20 years of financial support from the U.S. Department of Education, PBIS programmes now have a large evidence base with descriptive, evaluative, and experimental studies (Horner & Sugai, 2015). A recent review of 16 studies that evaluated PBIS in high schools documented some of the successes as well as challenges in implementing the programme (Estrapala, Rila, & Bruhn, in press).

Two examples of the research will illustrate the range of published studies and outcomes. A longitudinal, randomised controlled trial, using 37 elementary schools and surveying more than 2,500 school staff in the U.S., found that the programme had a significant, positive effect on reports of the schools' organisational health, resource influence, and staff affiliation (Bradshaw et al., 2009). However, in a study of observations of classroom management strategies in 33 elementary schools in the U.S. that had implemented PBIS, it was found that teachers' fidelity to the PBIS model came up short (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). While the programme prescribes that teachers should provide four positive interactions to every one negative interaction with children in the classroom, it was found that rates of reprimands were higher than rates of praise.

The PBIS model does not focus solely on the behaviour of the individual child, as traditional punitive approaches do. Instead it provides opportunities for exploring how the child's environment can be adapted to promote more positive behaviour, as well as considering how those around the child can also change their own behaviour. This focus means that PBIS aims to offer a more socially-just response to behaviour issues.

Collaborative and Proactive Solutions

The third and newest alternative approach to behaviour in schools is called Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS). This model takes a cognitive-behaviour psychosocial and ecological approach to addressing behavioural management problems. Developed and first described by Greene (1998), the developmentally and clinically-informed approach originally went by the name Collaborative Problem Solving. In 2013 a name change was necessitated by a lawsuit over intellectual property rights. (Collaborative Problem Solving continues to exist as a separate programme but does not maintain fidelity to the programme's improvements made by Greene.) The CPS model focuses on the fit (or mismatch) between the child's characteristics and the characteristics of his or her environment (for example, parents, teachers, peers, and neighbourhood). According to Greene, behaviour that adults may label as "misbehaviours" are better described as "challenging behaviours" because they reflect the condition when the demands of the environment exceed a child's capacity to respond adaptively (Greene, 2010).

At the heart of the model is recognition of the cognitions behind a child's challenging behaviours. More specifically, the model pinpoints lagging cognitive skills as the drivers of the behaviours. Consequently, identifying the triggering conditions (antecedents, circumstances) are central to understanding the source and function of the behaviour. The approach instructs teachers, parents, or other adults to recognise the child and environmental features that are contributing to the problem. A treatment strategy is then developed to address and resolve the child-environment incompatibility. The solution can take one of three approaches: unilateral problem-solving (i.e., adult-centred solution); collaborative problem-solving (i.e., child and adult jointly develop solutions); or changing expectations (whereby adults adjust their expectations).

The CPS approach is sometimes called Plan B, in contrast to the adult-centred Plan A, or the cognitive modifications necessary for adults in Plan C.

The key novel feature of this approach is contained in its name: collaborative problem solving. The transactional solution involves the basic steps of solving problems: defining the problem, recognising both the child's and adult's concerns, taking those concerns into account, generating alternative solutions, anticipating the outcomes of the different solutions, deciding on a solution, and then monitoring the selected solution. Working through the CPS process is not only helpful in addressing the presenting problem, it is also beneficial to the child because it provides training in a deficient or absent skill.

Under this model, a child is assessed for lagging skills (e.g., difficulties in making transitions, handling unpredictability, or expressing concerns) and unresolved problems (e.g., completing a class assignment, or talking at appropriate times). Greene developed an assessment instrument, the Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP), to document the issues (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Further, the use of a situational analysis is encouraged to help identify the nature of the problem. This involves identifying who, what, where, and when variables associated with the problem. Examining the function of the behaviour is also useful in order to understand in what ways the behaviour in question may be working for the children to get something they want, need, or seek to avoid. A developmental history is a worthwhile part of the assessment, including prior treatment efforts.

The CPS model is now implemented in many school systems throughout the United States and in several European countries, including some schools in England. So rather than characterising certain children as “attention-seeking,” “non-compliant,” “unmotivated,” or “limit-testing,” the lagging skills or unmet expectations of children become the focal point

(Greene, 2018). The response to undesired behaviour eschews rewards or punishment schemes (such as detention or exclusion) because those types of solutions do not address the cause of the problem and can serve to promote marginalisation and alienation. Utilisation of the approach in schools begins with assessing the nature of the child's lagging skills or unsolved problems using the ALSUP tool. Then, once those skills and problems have been identified, another instrument (The Problem Solving Plan), can be used to prioritise problems and track progress.

There is evidence about the effectiveness of the CPS model. In a recent review, Greene and Winkler (2019) summarised eleven empirical studies including three randomised controlled studies and additional studies that evaluated parts of the model. Those studies support its efficacy—in schools, with families, and in therapeutic facilities. For example, the evidence indicates the approach improves child behaviour, to the extent that behaviour modification programmes do but is more effective at teaching children skills (e.g., problem solving) that they are deficient in (Greene, 2010). Most germane for school systems, the approach has resulted in dramatic reductions in discipline referrals, detentions, and exclusions (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

In addition to the evidence supporting its effectiveness, the CPS approach is distinguished in several ways. The model recognises and respects children's individuality, accepts children's perspectives, and encourages children to help develop solutions to their behaviour problems or issues. Thus, it is a child-friendly approach that does not pathologise school children and is consonant with several key social justice principles.

Comparison of the approaches

All three approaches reflect a significant change in thinking about children's behaviour and how best to manage behaviours that may be considered undesirable. Indeed, the three approaches are more similar than different when considered in comparison to traditional school management

practises. We next highlight the similarities of the approaches before discussing several ways the programmes differ.

There are three fundamental similarities that differ markedly from traditional school responses to behaviour problems. Foremost, all three approaches share the overarching goal of reducing undesirable behaviour in schools through the use of non-punitive methods. The trio of programmes shun the traditional menu of punishments, including physical reprimands, detentions, and exclusions. Instead, the approaches embrace a different view about problem behaviours and the nature of effective interventions.

That view is informed by multiple psychological theories rather than simply Skinnerian operant conditioning. Instead, these programmes are built on principles from social learning, cognitive-behavioural, developmental psychopathology, and organisational behaviour. For example, both PBIS and CPS explicitly rely on functional behaviour analysis (Horner, 1994). That analysis recognises that it is imperative to understand the antecedents (or triggers) of, as well as functions that problematic behaviours serve for children.

With this different perspective comes a distinct lexicon. Transgressions, problems, and punishment are replaced by terms such as child-environment compatibility, transactions, expectations, prevention, incentives, and decision-making. Implicit in the three approaches are a recognition of children's individuality, an openness to hearing the child's perspective, and an orientation embodying a respect for the child. These are core concepts inherent in social justice principles of sensitive, dignified, and respectful treatment (Hoy & Tarter, 2004).

The approaches are also similar in their recognition that instead of taking a myopic focus on the child's disruptive or problematic actions, a holistic perspective is required that identifies the function the behaviour serves for the child as well as the role of the school environment

contributing to the problem. Perhaps more importantly, the approaches serve to prompt school leaders and staff to think about the ways in which the structure of the classroom and the schedule can promote positive behaviour. Proaction is a common principle shared among the three approaches.

In addition, the utilisation of collaboration is common across the approaches. Rather than solving problems from a top-down, unilateral, and authority-based orientation, explicit in the three approaches is the cooperation between children and school staff required in order to solve the perceived problems. The collaborative approach is most explicit in the CPS programme, given “collaborative” is present in its name. Fundamental to that model is the use of collaborative discussions between children and adults to determine solutions to conflicts. Collaborative responses to undesired behaviour, where all the relevant parties come together to discuss the behaviour, is also a fundamental doctrine in RP. This is done through conversations, face-to-face meetings, circles, or even conferences (Hendry, 2010). A collaborative approach is less prominent in PBIS, but that programme does rely on the use of family-school collaborations to solve problems.

The three approaches, although sharing some key ingredients, also differ. Given that each approach had a different genesis, it is not surprising the approaches have somewhat different conceptual foci. Restorative practice in schools derived from the criminal justice system (Fronius et al., 2019), whereas PBIS, had its origins in the late 1990s with the Effective Behaviour Supports (EBS) programme developed at the University of Oregon (Lewis & Sugai, 1999), and CPS, which is a hybrid model, grew out of multiple developmental theories, neuropsychology, and developmental psychopathology (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

Not surprisingly, each approach has somewhat different emphases, ethos, and highlights distinctive processes or techniques. For example, RP and PBIS focus on the whole school to a greater extent than CPS. With regard to process, RP and CPS feature the need to understand the other's perspective and the need for emotional literacy. Both PBIS and CPS recognise the importance of applied behaviour analysis for understanding children's behaviour, while RP does not address this concept in its literature.

Implementation of the approaches differ with regard to lead time, staff training and requirements, costs, and sustainability (see Fronius et al., 2019). For example, costs associated with installing PBIS depend on several factors, such as which tier the school adopts, how many schools adopt it at one time, and the existing capacities of the school system to implement new programmes. More than a decade ago, the costs were estimated to average between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per school (Horner et al., 2012). For schools implementing RP, training costs are the biggest financial outlay. Having skilled practitioners to facilitate restorative conversations is essential for RP to be effectively implemented in a school. Similarly, the initial costs of implementing CPS lie primarily in staff training.

The approaches also differ in the geographical reach, with RP being more common in the UK, particularly in Scotland, than in the U.S. (Fronius et al., 2019). School-wide PBIS has a strong foothold in the U.S. and according to the PBIS website (www.pbis.org), is now in nearly 30,000 schools. The CPS model is probably the least well known of the three approaches, although it is becoming more prevalent. Greene (2016) stated that the CPS approach has now been used in thousands of schools across the world.

In sum, the three approaches share fundamental similarities but also maintain some key differences. Whilst RP stands out as being more holistic and all-encompassing than the other

two, it likely requires more time, effort, and commitment to embed the programme in the school system than the other approaches. Both PBIS and CPS, compared to RP, are more structured and comprehensively documented. For example, there are questionnaires, scripts, and instruction booklets available to introduce CPS and PBIS to the children and school personnel. In contrast, the effectiveness of RP largely resides in the quality of facilitation, so staff training for that key role is of paramount importance.

Compatibility with social justice principles

The aim of this paper was to review and evaluate three prominent alternative approaches to behaviour management in schools, with a view to determining whether they are compatible with the key social justice principles of dignity, access, equity, and participation. All three of the approaches do indeed represent approaches that are in line with those social justice principles. Positive approaches to child behavioural management treat children with respect and dignity because they do not use punitive, embarrassing, or demeaning disciplinary practises. The approaches work to avoid exclusionary decisions, which by definition, limit a child's access to education. Instead, all three programmes strive to handle each child and each situation in an age appropriate way, one that fits the particular child and context. Thus, the programmes promote equity and reduce the likelihood of group-based disparities. Fourth, each programme involves the children collaboratively in solving the problem. That is in stark contrast to the traditional top-down punitive style that has historically been prevalent in schools throughout the world.

The use of collaborative solutions is a hallmark of all three approaches. Collaborative strategies place an emphasis on reciprocal rights and responsibilities, rather than an authority-based management style. Collaboration with children places responsibility on the child to contribute to developing a solution and to change their own behaviour. But collaborative

solutions also recognise the role of the context and other individuals in contributing to the behavioural issues. The cooperative nature of these three programmes also enables the child to participate in the resolution of the behaviour issue. It is a case of ‘working with’ the child, rather than ‘doing to’, as is the case with the imposition of punishments. The child’s participation in arriving at a solution is very much compatible with a social justice orientation.

Providing equal access is one area in which these approaches may find it difficult to claim to be socially just. To be able to participate in the collaborative process, such as through a restorative meeting, children need to have attained some degree of self-awareness, emotional literacy, and empathy that would enable them to understand the others’ viewpoint, to reflect on their own actions, and to articulate their feelings about the situation. Without these skills, it will be difficult for a child to fully participate in a collaborative process. For children who have not developed these skills, whether it be due to their age, learning needs, or inadequate opportunities, this deficit could prove to be a barrier to accessing the support available. However, it could also be argued that without these skills, a child would find it equally if not more difficult to benefit from punitive discipline.

Conclusion

For schools to adopt a more socially-just approach to children’s behaviour, it is necessary for there to be a shift in how undesirable behaviour is understood. Rather than conceiving of behaviour problems as something situated within an individual child, a social justice informed view recognises that role of the child’s home and school environments in the origin and maintenance of behaviour patterns. Working with children in a collaborative manner to resolve challenging behaviour in school, as outlined in the three programmes reviewed in this paper, represents an important direction for schools to take in order to embody a social justice

orientation to education. The support of educational psychologists is key in ensuring that school personnel can feel confident and be successful in choosing to move in this direction.

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