Disciplinary Exclusion: wicked problems in wicked settings.

Abstract

This article uses Rittel and Webber's categorisation of *wicked problems* in order to interrupt discourses around school behaviour. Each of the ten characteristics suggested by Rittel and Webber are examined using the English education system as a vehicle by which to consider and interrogate their complexity. This endeavour is crucial as although the characteristics of wicked problems naturally overlap, the cannot, and should not, be conflated if we wish to understand how different facets of a wicked problem shed light, and create shadows, that impact on all members of a school community. That school communities can be wicked settings adds nuance to the complexity of the problems that we face when educating students whose behaviours challenge the norms of their educational environment.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to challenge practices that exclude certain students from educational settings. Specifically, we aim to explore why children whose behaviour is troubling to a school, or whose behaviours challenge disciplinary systems based on a particular set of norms, are often excluded, firstly from the school, but more worryingly, from the educational system as a whole. Whilst formal procedures for exclusion are often involved in this process, there are other, more informal, practices that contribute to the total number of children and young people who are not in school at some point in their school journey.

Our primary argument is based on a belief that the problem of exclusion, where defined in this sense, is multifaceted, complex, and divisive. Frequently the subject of polemical responses, the perception of declining standards of pupil behaviour, evidenced through increased rates of exclusion, is a trope that is used to support a political and ideological rhetoric linked to the same sort of arguments that have supported 'back to basic' curriculum changes in recent years. It is our view that the subject needs to be examined within a much broader context if any sense of understanding is to be gained about how the issue might be tackled, moving the debate away from solutions derived from a particular way of conceptualising the problem to a broader and more nuanced view of what might be done.

A starting point might then be to examine whether the 'problem' of exclusion is one that is getting worse, and whether it is linked to declining standards of behaviour in school. In England, the rate of exclusions underwent a decline from historic rates in the 1990s when 0.16% of the school population was permanently excluded (Timpson, 2019) to a level of 0.06% in 2013/2014. There has been a steady rise in the figures since that date, to 0.1% in 2018/19, with the figures for 2019/20 being difficult to interpret because of the Covid 19 pandemic; it is worth noting that in the first part of that year, there was a 5% increase over the similar period in the previous year, suggesting that the upward trend in exclusions was continuing (DfE, 2021a). The rate of 0.10% represents 7900 exclusions or approximately 40 for every day that schools were open.

The rate of fixed term exclusions, a lesser response to behaviour with a limited time frame, showed a similar pattern to that of permanent exclusions, falling from a rate of 5.65% in 2006/07 to 3.50% in 2013/14, (Timpson, 2019) and then rising to 5.36% in 2018/19 (DfE, 2020). The figure for the first part of 2019/20 showed a 14% increase, although the Covid 19 pandemic makes the figures for the whole year difficult to interpret. It would seem that, based on these figures, responses to behaviour

in school have seen a significant increase in the use of punitive sanctions such as permanent and fixed term exclusions.

There are other data that suggests an increase in the number of children and young people who are being removed from schools, outside of formal exclusion processes. In 2019, Ofsted, the school inspectorate in England, published a blog about the practice of off-rolling, defined as the removal of a pupil from the roll of a school without using the permanent exclusion process (Ofsted, 2019). The definition of off-rolling being used indicates that the practice serves the interests of the school rather than the pupil and can involve a parent being pressurised into removing their child from the school. The blog suggests that, comparing statistics from the school census carried out in January 2017 with that in 2018, there were a total of 20000 pupil movements between year 10 and year 11 (the last two years leading to GCSE examinations). Whilst many of these can be explained, for example by a family leaving a school's catchment area or by a decision to home-school, Ofsted report that the destination of approximately half of these pupils is not known. In the same period, a total of 35,100 movements of pupils between the five years of the 11-16 age phase were to unknown destinations.

The point has been made that a problem exists relating to the exclusion of pupils from the schools in which their education began. Further examples can be given, for example in the often reported but not quantified practice of 'managed moves' between mainstream settings; in the use of Alternative Provision (AP), such as Pupils Referral Units (PRUs); in assessments of Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) leading to placement in specialist facilities such as Special Schools; in movement into NHS specialist provision; and into the Secure Estate.

The picture is complicated further by variabilities in exclusion rates between schools, between Local Authorities, between regions in England, and between pupil categories based on age, gender, ethnicity, SEND and Social and Economic Status (SES). For example, the Ofsted blog (Ofsted, 2019) notes that 340 schools had 'exceptional levels' of pupil movements when compared to schools with similar characteristics. Those of us who have worked in specialist settings for pupils excluded from school will be aware of the differing rates of exclusion for feeder schools; that this is not simply a reflection of the characteristics of the pupil intake is also clear. Some schools in 'good' areas will exclude pupils on a regular basis, whilst some schools in areas with high levels of deprivation seem to manage behaviour so successfully that exclusions are rare. That differences between schools are a significant determinant in outcomes is something that has been known for a long time, and this would seem to apply to rates of exclusion as much as it does to other outcome indicators.

Explanations for exclusionary practices of this type will reflect the way that the problem is viewed, and this will, in turn, predispose those who view the problem to particular potential solutions. Policy reflects objectives, and in a society with an increasing plurality of objectives reflecting different wished for states, it is difficult to reconcile policy differences, particularly where cultural diversity precludes an easy route to equity (Rittel and Webber, 1973). In the context of the type of exclusion under consideration, a policy direction that privileges standardised measures of attainment over more generalised measures of achievement is likely to generate a view that individual performance is more important than collaborative endeavour, resulting in the isolation and marginalisation of pupils who fail to reach expected levels, leading to an awareness of the benefits of the removal of these students to protect the academic reputation of the setting. If this policy direction is then extended to a re-organisation of the curriculum to reflect a narrow cultural view of what is seen as acceptable content, then the potential for exclusionary practices grows.]

A similar situation could develop with regard to pupils with SEND, reflecting several different views around whether or not they should be part of the general endeavour of education. One view would consider efficiency, where the exclusion of a particular pupil who challenges behavioural expectations might be seen as promoting the efficient education of the remainder of the class, or where that exclusion would prevent the inefficient use of resources, something enshrined in successive Education Acts in England (Education Act, 1996, for example), where a child with the protection of an SEND assessment can be denied a mainstream education if this is incompatible with 'the provision of efficient education for other children' (Section 316, Education Act, 1996). An alternative view would suggest that challenging behaviour is symptomatic of a social emotional or mental health issue that requires intervention, often in specialist provision. The increase in numbers of specialist settings for pupils assessed in this way, reflecting what might be seen as a medical model approach, suggests that this viewpoint is widely accepted, and may now be seen by some as the most readily available, albeit exclusionary, way of meeting the needs of a pupil who presents difficult behaviours in the mainstream classroom.

There is also an inevitable divergence in the degree to which certain behaviours or level of behaviours is seen as acceptable in an educational setting. Promoting good behaviour is an integral part of schooling; a swift perusal of the Teachers Standards in England will confirm this. However, schools have different views on what constitutes good or acceptable behaviour, on a continuum ranging from those that adopt a Zero-tolerance approach to those who seek to include every child, however challenging the circumstances of that child. Indeed, it is possible to suggest that some schools, by the way that they are positioned in the eyes of the broader public, have only to address the issue of behaviour in exceptional circumstances, given their intake. Inevitably, the place that a school occupies on this continuum will determine how they respond to challenging behaviour, including the degree to which exclusion, in any of the forms described above, will be a likely outcome for an individual pupil.

It is also perhaps inevitable that policy initiatives around behaviour take little account of the broader ecosystem of the school, at both the local and national level, and it is interesting to consider how this translates into concerns about practice across national landscapes. For example, the Children's Commissioner in England recently expressed concerns about practices that create "invisible children that are locked away without any legal protection" (Waldegrave, 2020, p.39) with the Australian Children's Commissioner suggesting a "general absence of student experiences, voices, guidance and participation in defining and addressing engagement with school" (Hancock and Zubrick, 2015 p.7). At this juncture, it must be acknowledged that both of these contexts are in the Global North and, although distinct, have many characteristics in common. The same cannot be said for national contexts in the Global South even though some elements of this article may still ring true within those contexts.

Rationale

It is difficult for a child, or their parents/carers, to contest, or to be heard, in a process based on an inability or unwillingness to conform to what are configured as normative, expected standards of behaviour. The very fact that this observation is not new indicates the need for additional ways of thinking about who is silenced, and why. For instance, such dilemmas were raised by Armstrong (2019) who noted the impact of muddled thinking around educational practice which sits alongside ill-considered public policy (p.2). And, in the middle of this, sits the student who confounds behavioural norms, and challenges the system, in ways that do not fit with the performative culture of schooling in the Global North. Armstrong identified this as a wicked problem in 2017, giving scope to expand and develop the ideas that he put forward. Indeed, by identifying the dangers inherent to

the mis-informed adoption of a *manage and discipline* model of child and adolescent behaviour, Armstrong invites us to think more deeply about wicked problems in the context of educational practices that lead to the exclusion of children and young people from educational settings.

The next section positions the paper in relation to the nature of a wicked problem is, examining what Rittel and Webber describe as the 'at least ten distinguishing properties' (1973, p.160) that make them wicked as opposed to tame. This will be, in part, through the lens of other users of the concept, linked to the problem that is at the centre of this paper, that of excluding those children who do not behave in ways that (some) schools demand. The insertion of 'some' is important here, as it is clear that exclusionary responses are not universal, even where schools or systems face problems that are similar and might be expected to produce similar disciplinary procedures. It might be that schools that might be called inclusionary, although there is a reluctance here to use a term that is so widely misused, do not see disciplinary exclusion for behavioural issues as an available response option and prefer to operationalise approaches to teaching and learning that seek to accommodate this diversity.

## Wicked Problems

One of the limitations of the term wicked problems is that the term can be mis-understood. Everyone faces problems at some time of their life, some of which may be thought of as more wicked than others. Indeed, there is a wide body of literature addressing subjects as disparate as teacher retention, stress, identity loss and so on, problems that are, indeed, profound but which do not necessarily amount to 'wicked problems'. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is necessary to trace this concept back to Rittel and Webber (1973) who began by describing 'tame' problems - those in which "the mission is clear, and it is clear, in turn, whether or not the problems have been solved" (p.160). They give examples from science as the most obvious source of tame problems pointing out that even the most difficult mathematical or scientific work has a clear and identifiable solution.

Rittel and Webber go on to suggest that problems of this nature require a society based on an unchallenged consensus about social relationships and hegemonic power, conditions that are less certain in a pluralistic society seeking equitable solutions that reflect that diversity. Societal problems, rather than being tame, are inherently wicked given the complexity of the impact that social actors have on society, on each other and, ultimately, on themselves. They suggest that there are 'at least' ten characteristics of wicked problems (1973, p.160) and some authors have, understandably, focused on certain of these characteristics, with Armstrong (2017) and Walton (2017) being particular examples, in order to focus on particular societal challenges.

However, given the conflicting and conflicted discourses around the behaviours of students (and arguably staff) in schools, the ten characteristics of wicked problems outlined by Rittel and Webber require full consideration. The next section of this paper deals with each characteristic in order to begin to understand the underlying, and often unforeseen, complexities around behaviour in schools.

## The wicked problem of exclusion

Clearly, a wide range of children and young people are excluded from educational environments for a variety of reasons; many have special educational needs and disabilities, some present behaviours that challenge and others have a foot in both camps. It would be unwise, perhaps impossible, to address the breadth of those designated as having a Special Educational Need and/or Disability when seeking to understand the wicked problem of exclusion. Therefore, the remainder of this

article will focus on behaviours that challenge, including those linked to a label of Special Educational Need.

1) There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem

One of the most challenging aspects of wicked problems is that of wanting to articulate a definitive formulation of the problem. To accept that this is not possible can be counter-intuitive for politicians or those charged with producing behaviour management strategies as formulating, and then solving, the problem is often demanded by powerful stakeholder – including those who have the best interests of children and young people at heart. As claimed by Rittel and Webber:

> "The formulation of a wicked problem is the problem! The process of formulating the problem and of conceiving a solution (or re-solution) are identical, since every specification of the problem is a specification of the direction in which a treatment is considered" (p.161)

So, to attempt to produce a *definitive formulation* of the problem of exclusion creates a chimera - an unrealisable dream. To take an example, if child A is unable to conform to the behavioural norms of school A, for whatever reason, this may well result in demands for solutions from many stakeholders. It is entirely feasible that school A will formulate the problem as within-child, set them on a path to diagnosis of some sort and, ultimately, move them onto specialist provision; such practices are well documented (Caslin, 2021; Malmqvist, 2018; Marshall and Goodall, 2015).

Alternatively, school A might not seek a within-child label for the problem but may still see the child as the cause of the problem (Nash, Schlösser and Scarr, 2016) and, as a result, exclude them from the educational establishment, whether by traditional means or via the increasing practice of off-rolling (Done and Knowler, 2021). The issue here would seem to be one of staff attitudes, supported by political rhetoric, which see some children as confrontational and unwilling to conform, without considering any causation for these responses. A further response is that of vacillating between viewing the child as the cause of the challenging behaviour or as the victim of circumstance (Stanforth and Rose, 2020) causing tensions between, and within, staff. A final position might be one derived from a perspective that children are the product of their environment, echoing the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977), that the ecosystem around the child needs to be considered as the prime factor in the behavioural responses of that child.

In all of these cases, the school formulates, and seeks to resolve, a problem. However, to accept that there is no definitive formulation of a that problem and that is what makes it wicked is to see, more clearly, the complexity of the matter.

So, in the example given above, if we accept that every specification of the problem is a specification of the direction in which a response is considered, it could be argued that, in each potential scenario described above, the solution is exclusion. If this is the case, then the specification of the problem (label, expulsion, confusion, ecological) is, in effect, an articulation of the solution - exclusion. It takes considerable insight, and a degree of courage, to acknowledge this point as to do so would lead us to move our questions from the immediate problem to a wider interrogation of the system within which exclusion exists, by considering the remit of schools, for example, and this might force us to consider what is, ultimately, the purpose of education.

2) Wicked problems have no stopping rule

The use of the term 'stopping-rule' relates to the fact that wicked problems cannot be framed as simply as tame problems, where a clear solution or stopping point can be reached, for example in scientific claims. In a wicked problem, it is not possible to determine when, or if, a final solution to

the problem has been reached, as there is always the feeling that further, better resolutions might be possible. In contrast to the inability to definitively formulate a wicked problem, characteristic 1, the lack of a stopping-rule will be less challenging for those attempting to deal with societal problems, whether from the perspective of urban development (Rittel and Webber, 1973), leadership (Webber and Khademian, 2008), or educational inclusion (Walton 2017; Armstrong, 2017, 2019), providing this lack of certainty is accepted.

The reason that the solution to a wicked problem cannot be tamed lies in the fact that "there are no criteria for sufficient understanding…and no ends to the causal chains that link interacting open systems" (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p.162). When we think about behaviours that challenge school systems, we quickly realise that it is impossible to set criteria for sufficient understanding - what would they be? Understanding of the child? Understanding of the school? Understanding of societal responses to difference? The list is endless. In addition, even if we could set a limit to what we see as sufficient understanding how would we, with any credibility, define the causal chains that link these elements?

Again, our real-world example gives a useful anchor to contemplate such questions. If the solution to labelling a child is exclusion, what are the sufficient 'criteria for understanding' that would justify such action? In many cases, reference to diagnostic criteria is nominated as sufficient and necessary conditions for labelling a child, but the use of diagnostic criteria when considering behaviour is contentious. For example, Colins (2015) questioned the use of the specifier for Conduct Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) beyond research contexts, questioning whether such a specifier is helpful in the real world. In addition, inconsistencies between diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in DSM-5 and the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (World Health Organisation, 2021) were raised by Sachser et al. (2018) who expressed concerns about the fact that the profile for PTSD was expanded to 20 symptoms in DSM-5 and that a working group for ICD-11 was proposing that the criteria for PTSD should be reduced to 6 symptoms.

A further example concerns how challenging behaviour is understood by practitioners, and this is linked to how managing it might also be interpreted. There might be some level of general consensus about what counts as appropriate behaviour in society, but this is likely to be couched in such general terms that any implementation will be fraught with difficulties. At the school level, the complexities will multiply; different members of staff will see things differently, in different contexts. It is often said that one teacher's working climate is another's low level disturbance. Behaviour during break times is likely to be seen in a different way than that in an assembly, and so on. It might then be necessary to consider differences in the criteria to be applied about behaviour between schools in different age phases or in areas of greater deprivation. There are then policies to be considered; in the years since 2010, a much more punitive rhetoric can be detected in central policy pronouncements. As Rittel and Webber suggest, those engaged in the resolution of a wicked problem are more likely to say the problem is solved than to say that this is the best solution that can be reached at this time (page 162, 1973)

3) Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but good-or-bad

Part of the reasoning behind this characteristic is that there are many actors involved in wicked problems, each with their own perspectives and priorities. An interesting example of this, from the English context, is that of Multi-Academy Trusts - trusts that operate more than one academy school; there are currently over 1,000 MATs. Such trusts have Headteacher Boards which have regulatory relationships with: the Department for Education; Local Authorities; Regional Schools

Commissioners; and the Education and Skills Funding Agency. In May 2021, the Department for Education produced new regulatory guidance for academy trusts and 'prospective convertors' which included a significant focus on decision making (DfE, 2021b).

If the judgements of each party are "likely to differ widely to accord with their group or personal interests, their special value-sets, and their ideological predilections" (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p.163), it is difficult to predict whose judgement is most likely to hold sway. If a school within a Multi-Academy Trust decides to address challenging behaviours according to one set of values, will their judgement of good-or-bad (or better-or-worse) ways to respond to challenging behaviours be questioned? Furthermore, where does the ecosystem of school begin and end? Where are the boundaries and who controls them? In addressing, or even facing, these questions it is clear that any true-or-false claims are difficult, if not impossible, to make.

4) There is no immediate and no ultimate test to a wicked problem

In fields subsumed by pressure to resolve challenging problems, a test that can be utilised to resolve the problem is appealing. To take an example from education, a child identified as having Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) may receive medication and, if hyperactive behaviour reduces, it is easy to view this as the ultimate test; the child is hyperactive, the medicine reduces this activity, thus the case had been proven. However, there are numerous examples of excluding children on the basis of a diagnosis of ADHD (Ewe, 2019; Gwernan-Jones, et al., 2015) so the test, in this case, does not address the wicked problem of exclusion. Indeed, it could be argued that such regimens of testing result in exclusion, or marginalisation. Ultimately, it could be argued that any tests that result in exclusion increase the wickedness of the problem.

One way to address such knowledge challenges is to explore the value of collaborative capacity builders in networks such as schools. The literature on effective leadership is awash with advice on networking, yet little is written about "the challenge associated with knowledge sharing among diverse participants in order to achieve networking effectiveness in a wicked problem setting" (Webber and Khademain, 2008 p.335). To accept that schools, and other educational establishments, are settings where problems are wicked, is to accept the importance of knowledge sharing among diverse participants such as learners, teachers, parents, and other associated experts. Such knowledge sharing is reliant on climates of trust which may be difficult in settings where exclusion is an accepted solution to diverse views on behaviour. If, for example, a parent views the behaviour of their child as a product of the school environment (Ule, Živoder and Du Bois-Reymond. 2017) and those who created that environment see problematic behaviour as a product of the home environment (Wienen et al., 2017), common ground is unlikely to be found. Positions and boundaries that create wicked problems cannot be understood via tests and a climate of testing does little to address the complexity of exclusion.

5) Every solution to a wicked problem is a "one-shot-operation"; because there is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error, every attempt counts significantly

As mentioned above, not only does the assessment and testing of pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour constitute an attempt to tame a wicked problem, but the outcome is one-shot in nature; every attempt counts significantly, and the repercussions of processes such as this can produce results that are little short of disastrous (see Bethany; BBC 2019; https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-50139692). This is not to disavow the intent of mental health experts who have the best interests of the child at heart, the point here is to draw attention to the high-stakes nature

of interventions that may result initially in exclusion from school and then become an inescapable progress to more restrictive environments.

Furthermore, assessment and testing is not the only means by which children and young people can be excluded from school; practitioner judgement is central to decisions made about whether a child should be excluded from the school or, indeed, the classroom. For the sake of consistency, let us imagine that child A is seen as the victim of circumstance. In some schools, this may result in relocation to other parts of the school for additional support. This support could be educational, in terms of the common practice of teaching assistants supporting individual learners with specific academic skills. Alternatively, this form of intervention could take the form of Nurture Groups or Inclusion Rooms whereby members of staff seek to encourage students to conform to the behaviour norms of the school. Whilst the interventions in these instances may be argued to produce positive results, one has to question for whom these choices are positive.

For school exclusion (whether approved or hidden) to be an option, the results are clearly life-changing, for better or worse. Children do not get a second chance at primary school, for example, or at being an eleven-year-old attending their local school. A particularly pernicious example of this is that of illegal exclusion in the time of the current pandemic (Ferguson, 2021). Whilst Ferguson focusses on the rights of vulnerable learners, in unprecedented times, she also highlights problems around the lack of protection of children's rights to education.

One-shot operations "leave traces that cannot be undone" (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p.163); a sobering thought for those who make decisions about exclusion. Such decisions leave traces probably unknown to educators with the power to remove or exclude learners on the basis of their behaviour, as they become a problem for someone else, or for another organisation, or for the wider society. The experience of disciplinary exclusion will be negative at the individual level, undoubtedly. At the level of society, the results are just as negative, and yet this does not seem to be a factor that forms part of the debate around the resolution of the wicked problem of disciplinary exclusion.

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2017 (tes, 2017)estimated the cost of an exclusion of this type as £370, 000 over the lifetime of the excluded child. Based on the number of exclusions in the preceding year, the report estimates the overall cost to the government in England as £2.1 billion, a figure that will have risen in tandem with the rise in exclusions. These costs are calculated on the basis of the sums involved in the education of these youngsters in alternative settings, in lost taxation from lower future earnings, in the higher likelihood of being within the criminal justice system, in benefit payments, and in higher-than-average healthcare costs. The report suggests that the actual costs are likely to be much higher than this, because of the growth of informal exclusionary processes such as off-rolling which are hard to quantify when no official statistics of occurrence are available. The Timpson review (2019) adds further material to what is a gloomy picture. Only 7% of excluded pupils gained good GCSE passes in Maths and English in 2015, over 1/3$^{rd}$ of pupils educated in AP were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the same year, and 23% of young offenders serving less than 12 months in prison had been permanently excluded prior to sentencing. It might well be seen that this represents a tame rather than wicked problem; can a society accept these costs, both in financial terms and in lost lives, because of the exclusion of pupils from school?

A further example of the 'one-shot operation' embedded within wicked problems is alluded to in the final section of the Rittel and Webber article; exclusion is a zero-sum issue. The sum provided for education in England, as in most countries, is subject to an annual budget, which might be increased year to year, although recent experience suggests that this is not a given. It is clear that

any increase in one part of the education system will result in less money being available in another. If more pupils are subject to exclusion, it is clear that costs will rise, in assessment processes, in bureaucratic procedures, and in the provision of alternative provision. The same applies if more pupils are seen as having challenging behaviour through the presence of special educational needs or disability, again in assessment, bureaucratic and provision costs. As both of these are happening, it would seem inevitable that there is less money available to prevent either of these trends developing and continuing, for example in better training for teachers, in better provision for classroom management or in teaching and learning developments that benefit hard to reach pupils,

6) Wicked problems do not have an enumerable (or an exhaustively descriptive) set of potential solutions, nor is there a well-described set of permissible operations that may be incorporated into the plan

When considering urban planning, Rittel and Webber note that "…in the pursuit of a wicked planning problem, a host of potential solutions arises; and another host is never thought up" (1973, p.164). For anyone in education, this truism can be lost in the quest for a solution which will, inevitably, be distilled into a small number of options. To take a scenario that will be familiar to many: a student presents challenging behaviours beyond the scope of the designated school behaviour policy for a number of weeks. The initial temptation for many will be to apply the published policy more forcefully, perhaps in consultation with the student's family. However, this is to ignore the opportunity for rethinking the policy, how it was planned, negotiated and agreed, who was involved in this process, and why. Rittel and Weber (1973) draw on the example of crime in the streets – a subject that resonates strongly with the thorny subject of behaviour in schools. The potential strategies for dealing with street crime that they offer range from repealing the laws that define crime, to substituting ethical self-control for police, to shooting all criminals (p. 164). These suggestions reflect practices in schools; do/can schools redefine behavioural difficulties; do schools exemplify (from the top) ethical self-control; do schools demonstrate default response such as expulsion or exclusion? There are members of society who would advocate for each of these approaches (potentially equal in number) but the eventual outcome is likely to be determined by whoever has the power to make decisions within an individual school.

7) Every wicked problem is essentially unique

Although it is self-evident that all scenarios are unique, in using the term 'essentially unique', Rittel and Webber are drawing our attention to the fact that "despite long lists of similarities…there always might be an additional distinguishing property this is of overriding importance" (1973, p.164). In terms of challenging behaviour, therefore, it is important to consider any additional issues that are of overriding importance. For some, it may be that additional considerations are limited to home conditions; for others, the curriculum, or the way that it is delivered, might be the factor of *overriding importance,* yet it is difficult to find published school behaviour policies that take such factors into account (Shortt, et al., 2017). In this sense, Rittel and Webber note that "There are no *classes* of wicked problems in the sense that principles of solution can be developed to fit *all* members of a class" (1973, p.164). Whilst Rittel and Webber are not talking about classes as we might in a school, their point is still salient. A school in one inner-city (or even two schools in a single Multi-Academy Trust) might look similar in many aspects but differences in ideological/philosophical values may be significant. To draw comparisons between schools, staff, students, and families is to obfuscate what is *essentially unique* about the way a problem is met, reducing our understanding of the situation to little more than operationalising generalised policy across the school ecosystem.

8) Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem

When analysing the behaviour management policies of 36 secondary schools in England, Shortt et al., (2017) concluded that the schools were basing their behaviour management policies on the need to secure academic achievement rather than on taking a more virtue-oriented approach. Whilst this will come as no surprise to readers from many national contexts, we would argue that the impact of behaviour management policies based upon academic achievement, is likely to be the genesis of still further wicked problems, as has been discussed in earlier sections of this article.

Another example of a wicked problem arising from current practice is that of the hierarchical nature of many school systems. Whilst one might expect Heat Teachers and managers to see the 'buck stopping at them', Rittel and Webber argue that when a wicked problem is recognised as a symptom of another problem "it is not surprising that the members of an organisation tend to see the problem on a level below their own level". (1973, p. 165). If we return to the example of Multi-Academy Trusts, it is likely that there will be at least four levels of management higher than that of the senior leadership of a given school. If actors in each of these levels sees the problem on a level below their own, it is difficult to see how school-based actors can make a difference on the ground.

9) The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution

As with each of the 10 characteristics of wicked problems addressed in this article, this statement needs unpicking. Clearly, the essence of a discrepancy can be explained in numerous ways, however, the second part of this statement is more subtle. As argued by Rittel and Webber: "People choose those explanations which are more plausible to them…you may say that everybody picks that explanation of a discrepancy which fits his intensions best and what conforms to the action-prospects that are available to him" (1073, p.166).

The notion of action-prospects is interesting. If we consider a student who has a diagnosed condition, the action-prospects are set by the system: provision that excludes the student from his or her peers might follow diagnosis, with the prospects for the student being profound. Separate provision is often not 'separate but equal' and long-term life chances may be significantly reduced. Another example may involve a child who is, and potentially always has, been called "naughty". For this student, the action-prospects will, in all likelihood, be punitive in nature resulting in some form of exclusion, potentially permanent. In both cases, the learner is deprived of the opportunity to be educated within their local community and the long-term consequences of this can be socially, and economically, disastrous for the child and for society at large.

10) The planner has no right to be wrong

The tenth characteristic of wicked problems defined by Rittel and Webber is intriguing. In essence, their argument is that "the planner who works with open systems is caught up in the ambiguity of their causal webs" (1973, p.167). One way in which to untangle, as far as possible, such causal webs is to more effectively share knowledge in order to become collaborative capacity builders (Webber and Khademain, 2008). However, as has been argued throughout this article, collaborative capacity building can be very difficult, if not impossible in a hierarchical system, where power is retained at the highest levels, particularly where the top layers of the hierarchy have limited contact with those closer to the problem.

If we accept that actors in each level in a hierarchy sees the problem on a level below their own, multi-layered school systems do little to enable collaboration, knowledge sharing and the building of networks beneficial to all members of a school community. Without the ability to disentangle individual- classroom- and organisational- level Influences (Oulette, et al., 2018), not only does the planner become caught up in the ambiguity of their causal webs, but they may also be unaware of the causal webs understood by others. Unfortunately, the casualties of this confusion are often the children and young people that any civil society should seek to educate.

## Concluding Remarks

Within the context of Rittel and Webber's model, disciplinary exclusion is clearly a wicked problem, and, whilst the English system was used as an example in this article, the issues discussed here have applicability in multi-national contexts in all parts of the world. Furthermore, to acknowledge the complexity that exists in all settings including those schools who exclude via disciplinary systems is to accept that educational establishments can also be defined as wicked. As such, any discussion about inclusive education, rather than what has been argued here about disciplinary exclusion, could be seen as doing little more than illuminating the obvious and mundane. Schools cannot possibly be described as inclusive when students are excluded along disciplinary lines, whether that encompasses statutory procedures leading to permanent exclusion or those informal procedures that place students whose behaviour is challenging outside of the 'regular' classroom. The consequences of these processes would seem to outweigh the actual or perceived benefits of inclusion, for the individuals concerned, for the schools that are involved schools and for the development of an equitable, diverse and pluralistic society.

Ultimately, the problem of exclusion is more profound than can be analysed here, although Rittel and Webber lay the foundations for us to move our gaze to a more abstracted level in terms of equity and the overall benefits of education for all rather than simply for those who can successfully navigate the system that currently exists. No pupil or student should be excluded from the school that they first choose to attend simply because their behaviours do not fit 'the system'. It is clear that a significant number of schools successfully manage the often challenging behaviours of some of their pupils which raises a simple question; if no school was not allowed to use disciplinary exclusions, how might this reconfigure our education system?

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