

Building relationships through expeditionary experiences

*A report for XP School, Doncaster,
from the Relational Schools Foundation*



Many thanks for taking the time to read this report of our work with the XP School.

Our starting point - our rationale for the Relational Schools Foundation - is a belief that strong, supportive relationships between all members of a school are fundamental. Where relationships are nurtured and developed as part of a values-based relational strategy, we believe that schools can help overcome social inequality.

This is based on the idea that the relationships played out at school are seen later on in society, and that developing and nurturing the relational capability of our children from an early age, will help them repair and build the communities and societies in which they will live, work and recreate.

I define a relationship as the connection between individuals, groups or organisations, revealed in the way they talk and behave. Relationships are too often a by-product of decisions taken with other priorities in mind. Worse, they're often neglected, undermined or put under intolerable pressure.

We know that the future brings challenges, with relationships increasingly conducted at a distance and under pressure. Yet, it is our firm belief that schools can create the conditions in which relationships flourish, and are learned. So we want to know whether and how schools are creating environments that foster relationships, in which students and staff interact in ways that enable learning and development.

The findings of our research are important; they are an important tool for education leadership. We know that public policy or organisational change can either increase relational distance or overcome it. Through our work so far, we also know that those schools we would classify as 'relational' returned not just lower levels of bullying and absence, and improved wellbeing, but also superior academic outcomes. Indeed, Ofsted's report of its inspection at XP school a few months after our study highlighted students' outstanding academic progress, because "there is no ceiling to the standards that pupils can reach", with disadvantaged students often outperforming their peers "because staff and leaders know these pupils very well".

What is vital to understand here, is that the work of XP is so uncomplicated in its design and execution,

and is delivered within a framework of stretched budgets and limited resource, in a system which currently seems to promote competition and individualism. What is represented here is a shift in mind-set about how education can be conducted, based on the creation of a genuine community in which people treat others as ends in themselves.

The philosopher Stern describes schools as places of "close relationships" and "irreplaceable people"; with teachers you will always remember and schools with affirming institutional memories. More than simply being communities, schools become the very place where we first learn to live in community.

We loved working with you, and we wish you all the very best as you continue your journey in Doncaster and beyond. I hope you agree that our study demonstrates the efficacy of your strategy, as also reflected in your recent Ofsted report and, most importantly, in the daily engagement and progress of your students.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Robert Loe,
Director of the Relational Schools Foundation

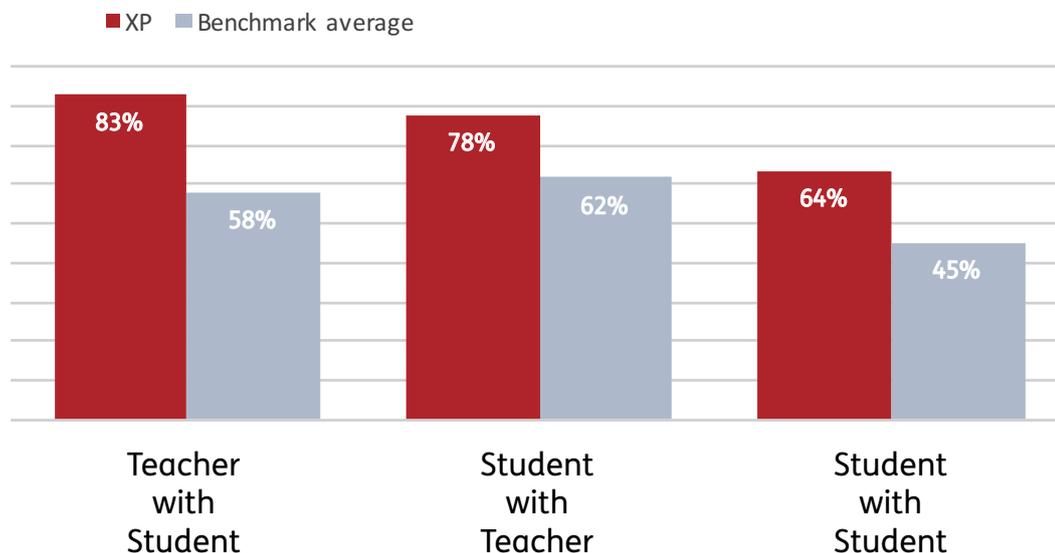


Executive Summary

Relationships at XP are significantly healthier than our benchmark average

Relational proximity of Year 7 at XP compared to our benchmark average

Percentage of maximum score



Our study found that relationships between students and their teachers, and with other students, were much closer, deeper and more purposeful than the averages in our benchmark data*. Relational proximity, our measure of how well an individual engages with the thinking, emotions and behaviour of another, was generally high across all elements measured in the school. Based upon the 533 surveys completed, relational proximity at XP was, on average, 17% higher than our national benchmark average. Specifically, when we look at Year 7:

Teachers scored their relationship with the students at 83% (25% higher than the norm)

Students scored their relationships with the teachers at 78% (16% higher)

Students scored their relationships with other students at 64% (19% higher)

*Relational Schools Foundation has amassed a significant body of data on student-to-student and teacher-student relationships. Drawn from rural to highly urbanised city contexts, it represents over 260,000 lines of data so far.

What makes these results so impressive is that the data was only collected two weeks after having only just met each other. In other words, two weeks earlier students and teachers had no relationship at all! This indicates that the four-day Outward Bound expedition, in which the incoming Year 7 students get to meet, interact and form relationships with their teachers before the school term begins, had a very positive impact on the quality of relationships in the school, and quickly enabled the creation of school culture, or 'crew' culture, as the school describe it.

"It brought us together to form a crew - a body of people that respect one another, that show integrity, that have the common mission of working together" - XP Teacher



Introduction

“The most important assessments that take place in any school building are seen by no one. They take place inside the heads of students, all day long ... these internal assessments govern how much they care, how hard they work, and how much they learn” - Ron Berger, 2011¹

The need to focus on core, personal, and intangible skills is often overlooked. When it is so easy to measure and monitor academic outputs, behaviours, and general performance, these often become our headlines and a schools’ focus. Whilst of course they are important - time and again it has been shown that such outcomes are largely determined by stable and committed relationships with supportive adults or peers.

Expeditionary Learning (EL) is a US-based educational model that puts this understanding of learning at its heart. Through a project-based approach with a high level of collaboration and student engagement, this model seeks to motivate students towards their own goals and achievements. Subsequently, and as outlined in Ron Berger’s quote, there has been a growing awareness of the benefits that EL can have, from increased self-esteem, confidence and happiness on the one hand, to classroom success and attainment on the other.

The benefits of EL include increased self-esteem, confidence, happiness, and attainment

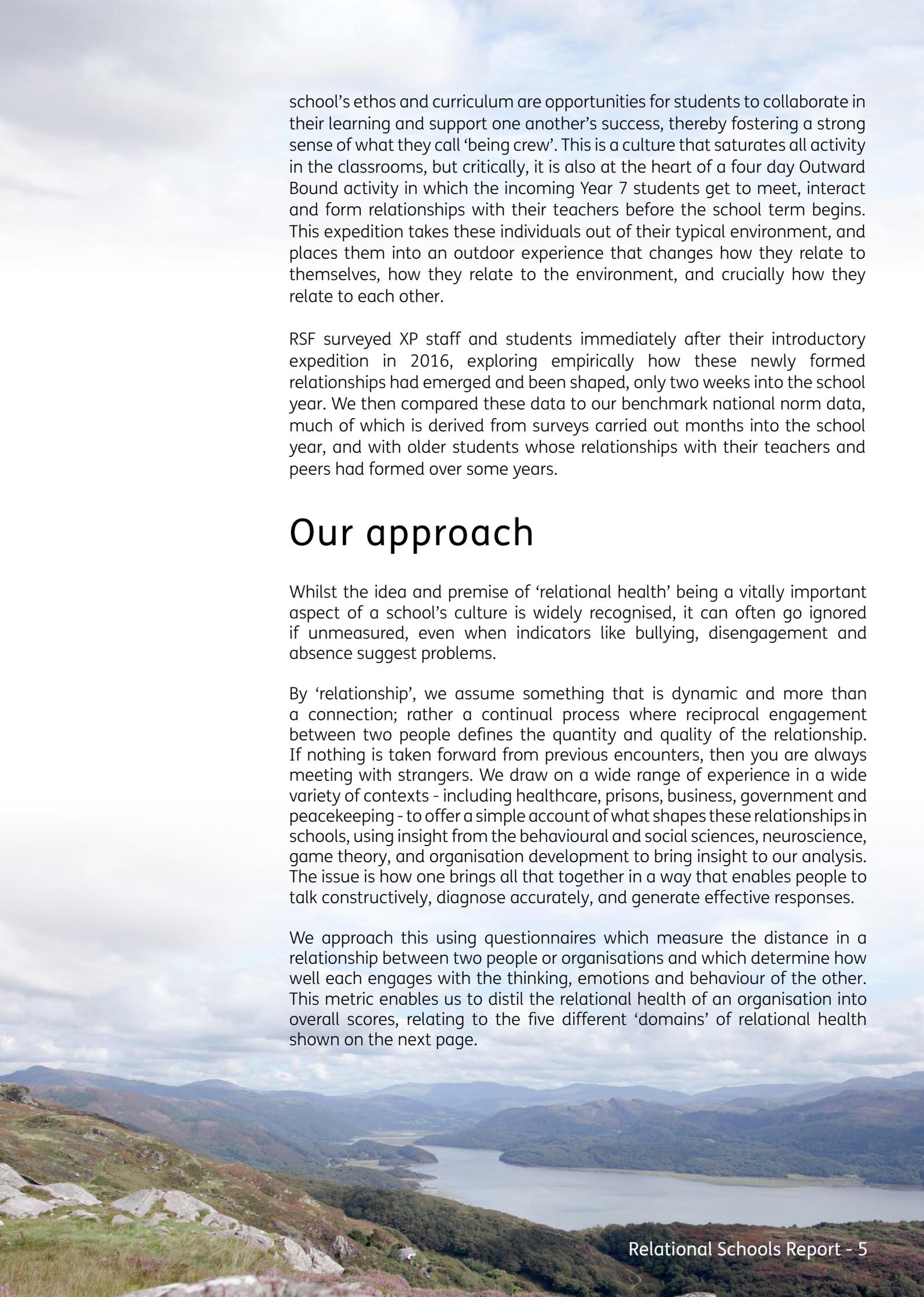
But what about the impact that this form of education has upon the relational culture of a school? How does the relational health of teachers and students change in these environments? To what extent does a highly collaborative school foster the sort of positive and flourishing interactions and relationships that we know from the research improve educational, social and health outcomes? How do out-of-class experiences change the way that both groups relate with and think about each other? And critically, how does a school become more intentional about the way it builds and sustains its culture and community?

The Relational Schools Foundation (RSF) was invited by XP School in Doncaster to look more closely at the impact of their expeditionary culture, and to help answer some of these questions.

Being ‘crew’ at XP

Opened in August 2014, XP is a secondary school whose learning approach is heavily influenced by the Expeditionary Learning model. At the heart of the

¹ Berger, R. 2011. *Leaders of Their Own Learning*. Josey-Bass: San Francisco



school's ethos and curriculum are opportunities for students to collaborate in their learning and support one another's success, thereby fostering a strong sense of what they call 'being crew'. This is a culture that saturates all activity in the classrooms, but critically, it is also at the heart of a four day Outward Bound activity in which the incoming Year 7 students get to meet, interact and form relationships with their teachers before the school term begins. This expedition takes these individuals out of their typical environment, and places them into an outdoor experience that changes how they relate to themselves, how they relate to the environment, and crucially how they relate to each other.

RSF surveyed XP staff and students immediately after their introductory expedition in 2016, exploring empirically how these newly formed relationships had emerged and been shaped, only two weeks into the school year. We then compared these data to our benchmark national norm data, much of which is derived from surveys carried out months into the school year, and with older students whose relationships with their teachers and peers had formed over some years.

Our approach

Whilst the idea and premise of 'relational health' being a vitally important aspect of a school's culture is widely recognised, it can often go ignored if unmeasured, even when indicators like bullying, disengagement and absence suggest problems.

By 'relationship', we assume something that is dynamic and more than a connection; rather a continual process where reciprocal engagement between two people defines the quantity and quality of the relationship. If nothing is taken forward from previous encounters, then you are always meeting with strangers. We draw on a wide range of experience in a wide variety of contexts - including healthcare, prisons, business, government and peacekeeping - to offer a simple account of what shapes these relationships in schools, using insight from the behavioural and social sciences, neuroscience, game theory, and organisation development to bring insight to our analysis. The issue is how one brings all that together in a way that enables people to talk constructively, diagnose accurately, and generate effective responses.

We approach this using questionnaires which measure the distance in a relationship between two people or organisations and which determine how well each engages with the thinking, emotions and behaviour of the other. This metric enables us to distil the relational health of an organisation into overall scores, relating to the five different 'domains' of relational health shown on the next page.

1



Encounter

Encounter - When a relationship exists there will be a series of encounters with another person or group, creating the context in which a relationship can be built and developed. To measure this, we explore the amount, quality and nature of contact and communication within a relationship, and how it builds a sense of connectedness. Have you had a text or email which you completely misinterpreted because you didn't see the other person's expression or hear their tone of voice at the time? Well, we look at whether the ways people communicate (face to face, email, text, etc) help avoid misunderstanding and create a sense of connection.

2



Storyline

Storyline - Those encounters are shaped by the experience (memory) of past encounters and the expectation (imagination) of future encounters. This leads us into an exploration of the time dynamic and the storyline of a relationship. We define this as 'continuity'. Relationships with old friends aren't the same as new ones. So we look at whether the various interactions over time build a sense of momentum, growth, stability or ultimately a sense of belonging and loyalty.

3



Knowledge

Knowledge - Thus, relationships are close when the other is known, or at least knowable. We explore this domain by asking questions about the quality of information and knowledge one party has about the other, and the variety of contexts in which one is able to build the relationship. If you know the context you might understand why a homework wasn't done. Or in class, if you can't do something, when you're struggling most, that's when you show your real self and that's when you need people around you, who really know you, and who can interpret your actions and manage the relationship effectively.

4



Fairness

Fairness - The 'parity' of a relationship refers to the way that power and influence are moderated between two people, so as to shape the ability and willingness of both parties to engage and contribute. To explore this, we ask questions about fairness and mutual respect, and also about self-respect. People really mind if something is unfair. So, is authority used in ways that encourage participation, promote fairness and convey respect?

5



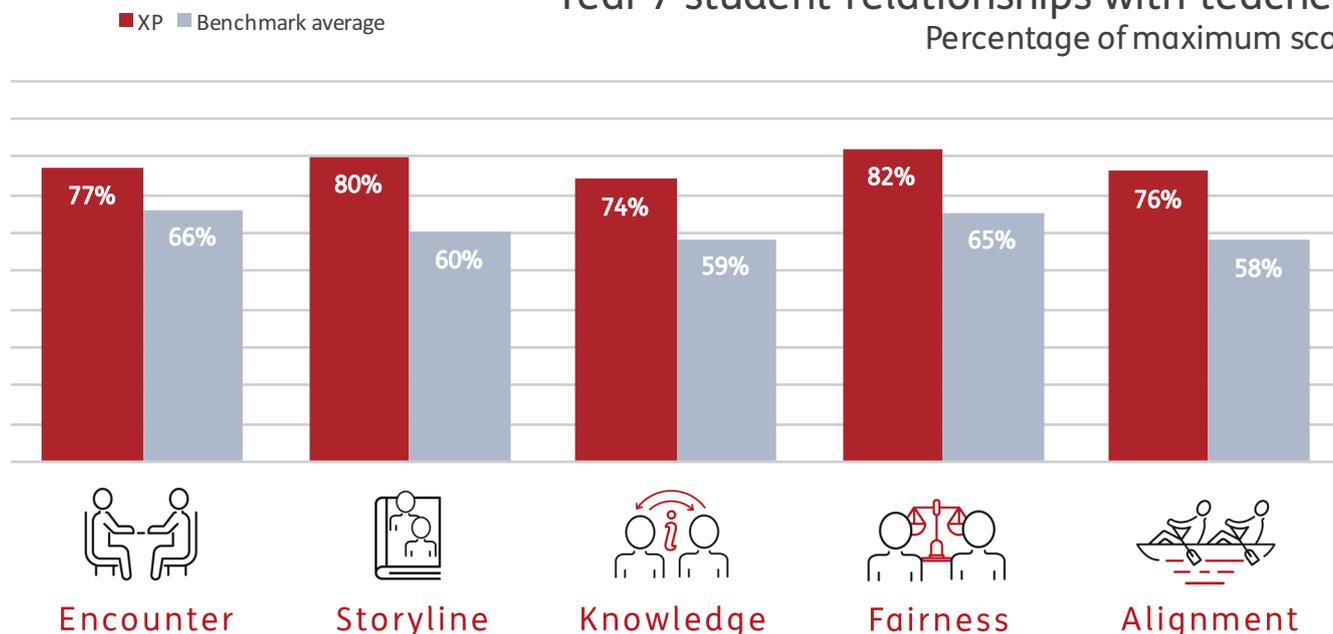
Alignment

Alignment - Relationships are also characterised by values and purpose, and so we explore the extent to which the understanding of these are shared between the parties; the extent to which there is alignment and common ground. Are they shared in ways that bring synergy and motivation to a relationship? When examining the purposes of a school, and its people, how deep rooted are their intentions or are the two parties pulling in different directions?

We generate complex and robust empirical data about a seemingly intangible aspect of school experience. We take the complexity of relationships and make them simple. Our analysis enables us to understand the factors that underpin strong relationships in one context versus weaker relationships in the other.

Results - Student to Teacher

Year 7 student relationships with teachers Percentage of maximum score



The student-teacher relationship is self-evidently critical in a school context. Where that relationship is strong and proximity in the five domains is high, then the connectedness, belonging, understanding, mutual respect and shared identity will enable effective learning and engagement. Our research also suggests that strong relationships in the classroom can mitigate for dysfunctional relationships outside of the school, countering disadvantage and providing a platform for improved social mobility.

Our survey explored what students in Year 7 think of their relationships with their Crew leaders.

We found that, in each of the domains, the quality of student to teacher relationships is very high.

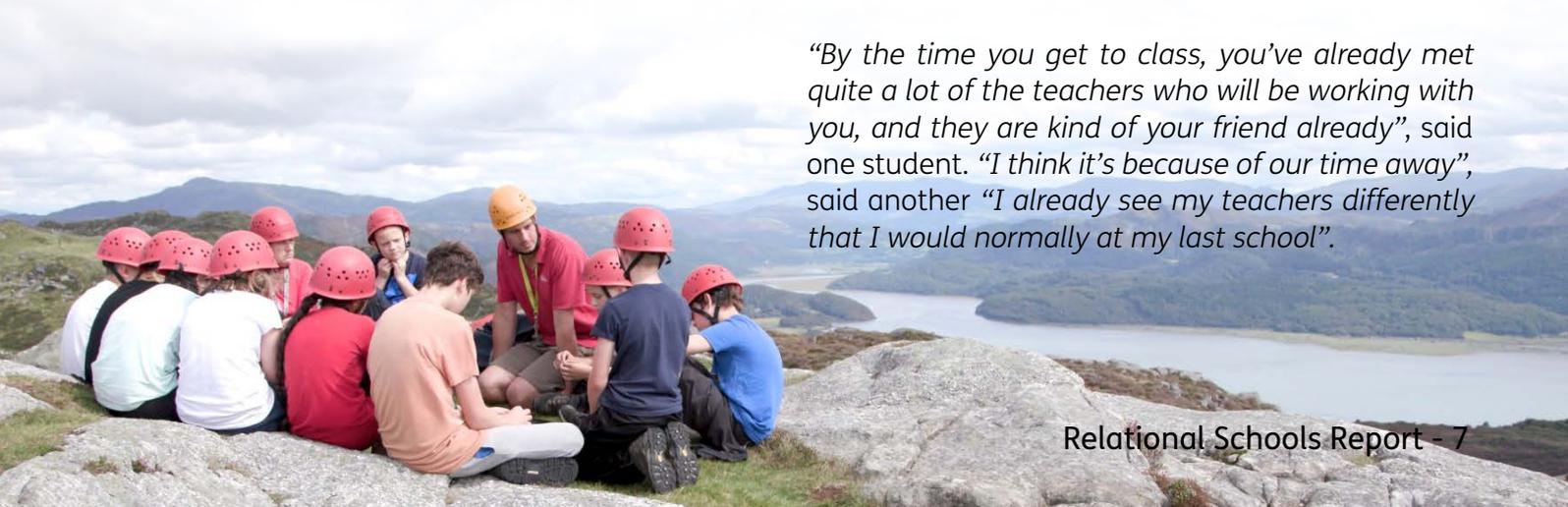
Compared to our benchmark norms, the data indicates:

- 11% greater connectedness (encounter)
- 20% greater belonging (storyline)
- 15% greater understanding (knowledge)
- 17% greater mutual respect (fairness)
- 18% greater shared identity (alignment)

These scores - from students who had only met their teachers two weeks before the survey - are astounding!

And whilst relationships are supported more generally by the embedded school culture, there can be no doubt about the impact of the expedition on the quality of the relationships being reported.

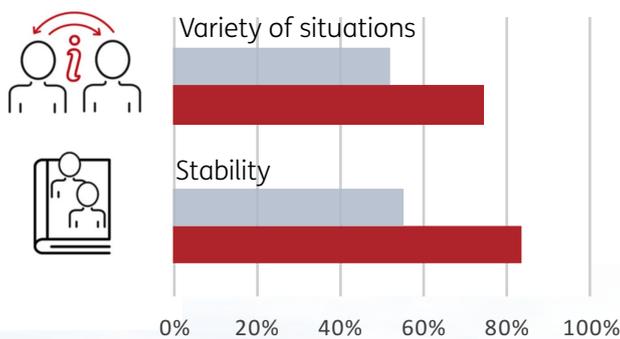
“By the time you get to class, you’ve already met quite a lot of the teachers who will be working with you, and they are kind of your friend already”, said one student. “I think it’s because of our time away”, said another “I already see my teachers differently that I would normally at my last school”.



Whilst the aggregated data indicates that students perceive their relationships with their teachers to be very high in general, the scores for 'storyline' and 'knowledge' scored particularly well. This suggests that the expedition was very successful at broadening the range and depth of students' information about their teachers, and so fuelled both the desire and capacity to manage future encounters back in the classroom.

The findings indicate that, because students had seen their teacher in a variety of novel situations, where they were challenged and encouraged to take risks, experiencing fear and vulnerability in front of each other, their 'knowledge' and 'trust' grew as a result. They felt a strong sense of stability emerging in their relationship.

Reflecting on this when back in school, one student explained that *"she [the teacher] accepts me for who I am, and she's just always there for me whether I'm being annoying, upset or frustrated"*.



Having both the stability (a belief that their relationship with their teacher will function even when things get tough) as well as the knowledge of how they are likely to act (and react) in particular situations, has enabled this student to see her teacher as someone she can trust.

This level of stability of relationship is rare between individuals who have only met very recently for the first time, and obviously sets things up very well for future learning as 'crew'. Because of the expeditionary learning context, these positive trends appear to have transferred quickly into the classroom environment.

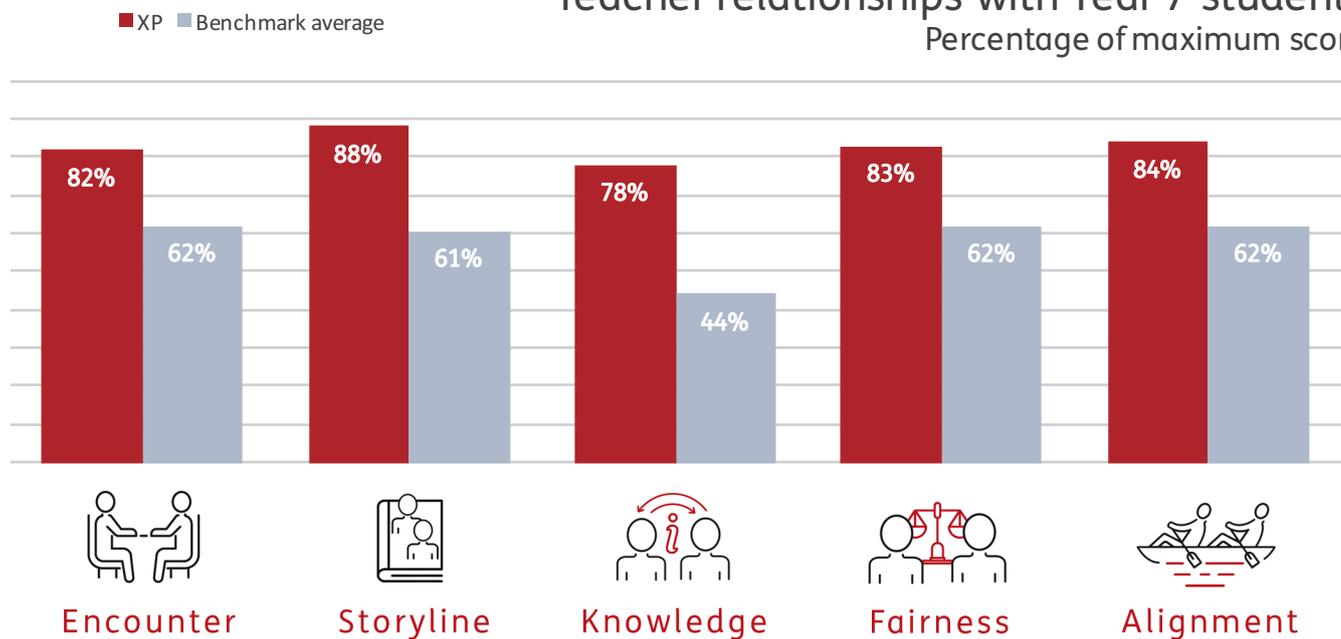
When asked to consider what this will mean as they progress into the academic term, one student commented: *"I feel the bond between teachers and pupils really helps in the classroom. The fact that we all know each other on a name to name basis; the fact that we all know people's dislikes and likes, and that we can all get along with each other and put aside our differences and actually work as a team, without leaving other people behind; the fact that we can all aim for a common goal and achieve that together as a team and we aren't all just left on our own; that we have that support there ... we have that kind of bond that will help us throughout life"*.

What this student is referring to is what we capture in the 'knowledge' domain, described above, which refers to how a relationship can be strengthened by being known in a variety of scenarios. In this case, the student feels the ground has been laid for a strong relationship from this moment on.

"She accepts me for who I am, and she's just going to be there for me whether I'm being annoying, upset or frustrated."

Results - Teacher to Student

Teacher relationships with Year 7 students Percentage of maximum score



Where teachers perceive their relationship with their students as strong, and score proximity highly in the five domains, then the stage is set for them to focus on the business of learning, whatever the curricular context. In XP's case, where the curriculum is so dependent on teamwork and a sense of shared purpose, and on an unusually high degree of delegated authority to students, these relationships are vital. These results indicate that teachers feel they know their students well, and understand their needs, enabling them to personalise their approaches, and to use their authority in ways that build participation and self-respect.

Our survey explored what the Crew leaders think of their relationships with students in Year 7.

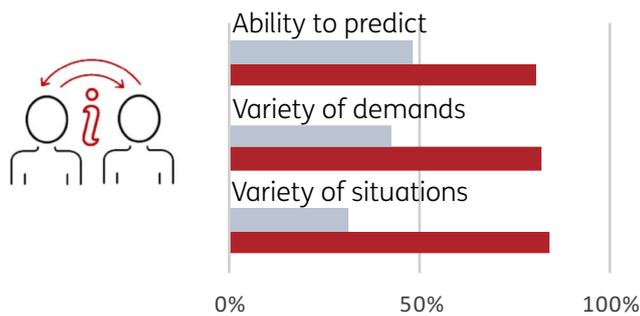
In each domain, teacher to student relationships scored extremely highly. Compared to our benchmark norms, teachers experience:

- 20% greater connectedness (encounter)
- 27% greater belonging (storyline)
- 34% greater understanding (knowledge)
- 21% greater mutual respect (fairness)
- 22% greater shared identity (alignment)

Whilst these scores are significantly higher than our benchmarks, it is interesting to note that they are also higher than the students' perception of the relationship. What we see here is the significant impact of the expedition on the teacher's perception of the relational dynamics. For us, this demonstrates the power of the expeditionary experience as a means by which one teacher can come to know many students; a task that can, in typical school contexts, take some time.

What our data indicates is just how close teachers had become to the group as a whole: *"It's a family, it's friendships, it's support, it's all of that together and it's so much more than a form class that I have had in other schools"*, said one new teacher to the school. *"It enables me to work with my students so they can get the absolute best of what I have to offer and I can get the best of what they can offer; it's a two way street"*.

As we unpack this and explore the data in more detail, it becomes even more clear that much of the strength of the relationships reported is founded on the deeper levels of knowledge the expedition enabled them to gain about the students. Here, a teacher's ability to predict behaviour, and the variety of circumstances in which teachers had seen students, were of significance:



These particular strengths, compared to our norm data, can almost certainly be attributed to the expedition, with teachers experiencing and seeing their students in a wide variety of demanding contexts. Whether it was witnessing how a student coped with being stranded in a capsizing raft, or how they motivated and supported their new friends, the diversity of non-classroom situations was key. As one teacher commented about their trip away, “it allowed me to see the child for who they really are ... there was a real joint acceptance”.

“It was like no induction ever”, added another. “We were able to see situations through the kids’ eyes ... how do they feel in the classroom when they are learning this way, what does it feel like?”.

This type of diverse knowledge wasn’t just described as something that was ‘nice’, but rather in terms of a fundamental relational building block that had been laid as an investment for the future.

“If you are going to make any difference to young people’s lives you have got to know who they are, what makes them tick, what drives them, what upsets them, what makes them happy”

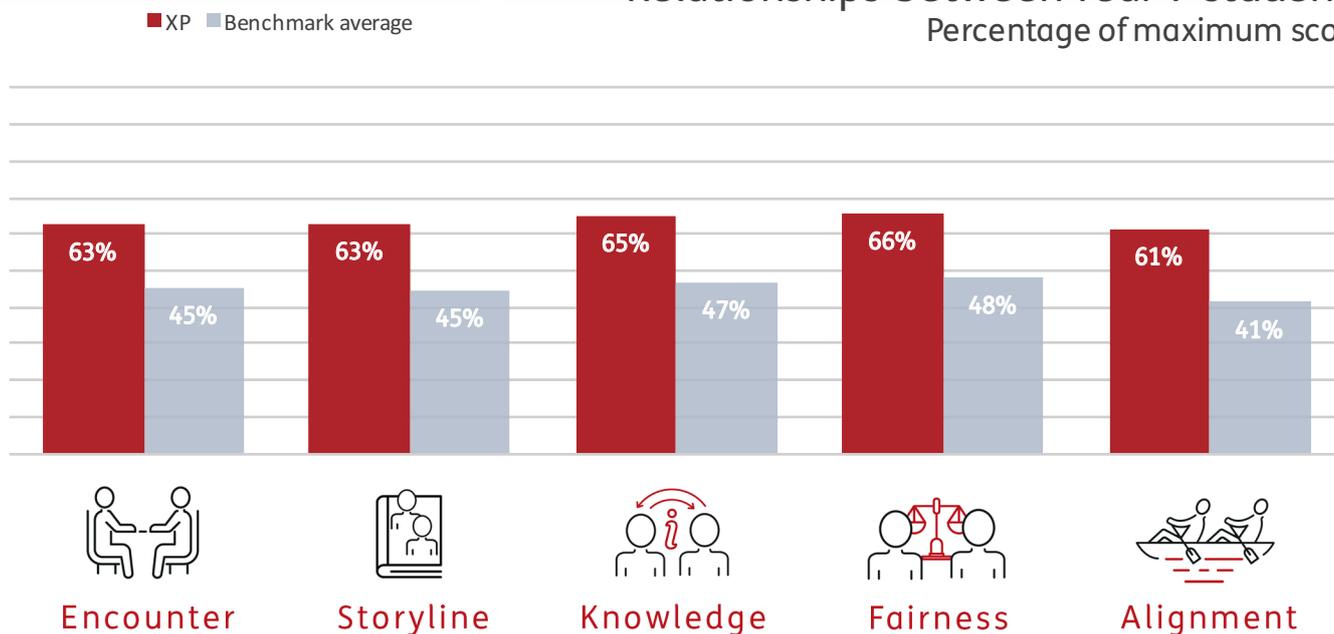
Being able to predict a student’s behaviour, and understand how they ‘tick’, is a fundamental aspect of relating to someone. Teachers had greater confidence in their classroom practice, knowing how students were likely to behave and anticipate how they might respond.

“It was like no induction ever. We were able to see it through the kids eyes ... how do they feel in the classroom when they are learning this way, what does it feel like.”



Results - Student to student

Relationships between Year 7 students Percentage of maximum score



Stimulating and nurturing relationships between young people matters. We know from research that students need to feel connected to school, and that those who are, and who feel cared for by peers at school, are happier, healthier and achieve better academic outcomes. What we see at XP is the intentional provision of a variety of opportunities for students to make those relationships, at the core of its curriculum. So in the context of having exactly the same external pressures as other schools, XP have chosen a different approach to school and classroom composition. What we believed we saw in Doncaster, and in other human scale contexts, was a precondition for relationship building: students who knew each other and a teacher who understood the dynamics of the class very well indeed.

Our survey explored the relationships between students in Year 7.

XP students scored the quality of their relationships higher than the benchmark norm in each of the domains.

- 18% greater connectedness (encounter)
- 18% greater belonging (storyline)
- 18% greater understanding (knowledge)
- 18% greater mutual respect (fairness)
- 20% greater shared identity (alignment)

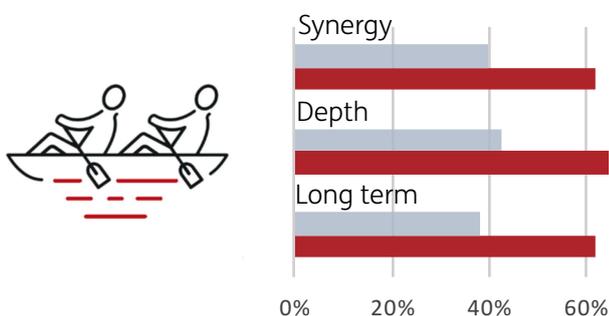
Whilst these scores are not as high as the other relationships we measured at XP, they are still significantly higher than the national norm data. Here again, after only knowing each other for less than a month, these students demonstrate a close level of perceived relationship.

“Whilst I’ve been here I think I’ve made friends with everyone in the crew. I think we are going to have lots of friends to talk to and not be alone, and we are going to be able to help people when things get tough.”



The largest difference between the norm data and that from XP is in the alignment or commonality that students perceived between each other. This refers directly to how much the group feels like a team, with shared goals and shared values.

To that extent, we would suggest that a figure of 20% over our benchmark norm is a significant and very positive difference, especially with respect to XP's aim of creating high-function pastoral tutor groups or "crews".



When further examined, the alignment between students has particular strengths in its synergy, depth, and long term visions. Having engaged in team based activities like raft building and orienteering, this perhaps isn't surprising.

As one student put it, *"things like climbing up rock faces, doing a raft, climbing a really steep mountain; these are only possible when we work together as a crew. We have to think like that to get these things done"*.

"By getting through these experiences and surviving it, they will now have that instant team bond", added one of the Outward Bound leaders.

"We are going to have lots of friends and we are going to be able to help each other when things get tough."

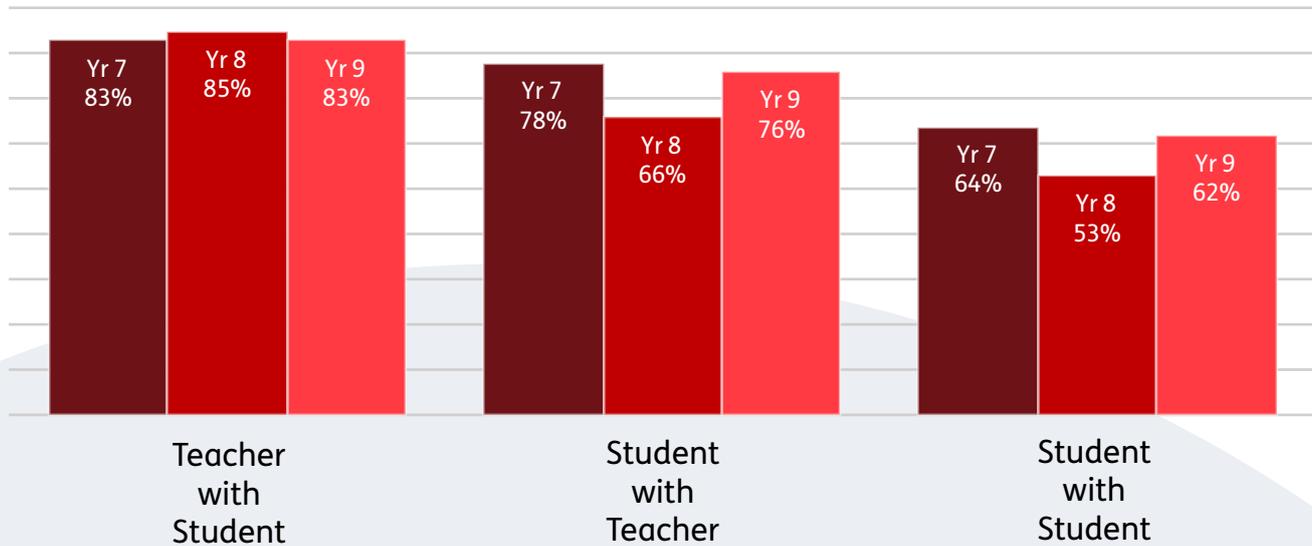
Indeed, the students surveyed appear to have taken the intense team experiences from their expedition to heart, and are now readily applying it in their 'crew' mentality at XP. *"Whether I pass or not is my business, but it's everyone else's business as well"*, said one student. *"It's putting other people's priorities in front of yourself"*.

"By getting through these experiences and surviving it, they have that instant bond and team work"



Relationships in each year

Relational proximity of year groups 7-9 at XP Percentage of maximum score



Of course, XP's 'crew' mentality is dependent on activities that we can see enable and develop relational proximity. But these activities cannot all involve outward bound trips. They have to be set in the context of the school and the classroom too.

It is clear from our data that the expedition at the start of the new school year provided a very powerful platform for the development of strong 'crew' relationships, but what about students in other years? How can a school transfer the relational quality of the outward bound context, to a classroom context? And, more importantly for this survey, how successful have XP's classroom expeditions - it's projects and other curricular work - been at providing a context in which relationships can be built between 'crew'?

To explore this, we separated the results into individual year groups to see if relational health is widespread and embedded.

As the above graphs show, this appears to be the case. **In every type of relationship, there is a consistently high level of proximity between the parties.**

We would suggest that this is in large part due to XP's specific pedagogical approach.

Whilst many schools encourage collaboration between students and staff, few have a concept like

'crew' at the heart of their culture. Here though, the idea of 'being crew' deliberately carries the outward bound experience into the classroom. *"XP stands alone in that respect"*, said one Outward Bound leader. *"Their school is a journey right through their learning career, and that marries so nicely with what we do"*.

Indeed as the head teacher added, *"it's our culture, and the fact that these kids and these staff care about each other and believe in each other and want each other to succeed"*.

In this respect, and to carry the metaphor forward, the true objective of the school journey or project for these students is getting to university, just as the true objective of their Outward Bound expeditions was the top of a mountain.

Likewise, the staff articulated this deeply embedded sense of culture within their own interactions with each other. *"The staff meetings at XP are crew meetings. It is unusual that the head, the teachers, the coaches, everybody has a voice in those meetings"*, said one newly qualified teacher.

"We've all got to work together to make sure that ship gets to its destination, and that destination is that all our students are university ready."

Conclusions

For XP, a school built on well-conceived and consistently-applied design principles, the aim of its curriculum is to enable students and teachers to know each other. This is the foundation of what personalised learning really means.

Those design principles don't merely provide a framework for a what a school should embrace, but more what a school should reject. As such, personalisation is not possible in a school of 2,000 students unless it is broken down into a more human scale environment. XP set out to show that one can create human-scale environments - human-scale and well-functioning communities - within the same financial constraints as any school. For Gwyn ap Harri, CEO: *"If you look at successful communities, they succeed because of their differences. They're not similar people with similar ideas. They're diverse people with a common goal"*.

That is what they said we would find in the classrooms, in their curriculum, in their crew, and even in their staffroom. And it is exactly what we did find: a healthy vibrant community.

In every dimension and in every relationship, teachers and students were closer, compared to our norm data.

On average, teachers scored their relationships with their students at 82% (20% higher than the norm)

On average, students scored their relationships with their teachers at 67% (5% higher)

On average, students scored their relationships with other students at 60% (8% higher)

What we saw in the data was an empirical expression of the concept of 'crew'. Expressed verbally, this means that they, *"support and challenge each other"*.

This is not a platitude - it means that they are all in this together. It means a togetherness of teacher and student and students themselves. A very closely forged group of people, with a purpose. A 'crew'. And it's when you can't do things, or when you are struggling the most, that you show your vulnerability and your real self, and that's when you

need your crew to help you. If you are crew, then a problem is shared and solved together. As one student expressed with real passion: *"It means a lot. It basically is a second family. People are there for you and you are there for them"*.

Taking the Outward Bound ...

The catalyst for the relational proximity we found was quite clearly the Outward Bound expedition. The influence and impact that this experience had was profound. The challenging environment had forged connectedness, belonging, understanding, respect, and an alignment of purpose and goals. As the teachers and students themselves identify, being with one another in contexts that not only push them outside of their comfort zones, but which also demand a high level of cooperation, has influenced the way they see each other, and the extent to which they are prepared to work to sustain their newly formed relationships.

... back into school

But, as XP knows, it is vital that the relational gains made in the hills and valleys of Wales are sustained and developed when everyone returns to their classrooms. Otherwise, it's just a jolly.

Again, our evidence indicates clearly that this is happening in Doncaster. We suggest that this is the direct result of the school's culture and its curricular practice of reflecting on character traits and 'habits of work and learning', which aim to very closely mirror the goals and feel of Outward Bound experiences; to treat each lesson and each learning experience as an expedition that has impact beyond the school community. And of course this comes down to the way the school is led; how the sense of what it means to be 'crew' is expressed through the organisation, and ultimately by teachers and students in their practice:

"It's a very closely forged group of people with a purpose, we are here to do something, we are here to help our students achieve; to get to university; to be amazing people".

It's no surprise that Ron Berger describes schooling like this as a proclamation of what it means to be human ('We are Crew', forthcoming, 2018).

The Relational Schools Foundation

The Relational Schools Foundation was formed in early 2014 to improve how schools and the people who spend their daily lives studying and working in them, understand, value and enact their relationships with one another. Through our work, we seek to influence schools' policy and organisational practice with a relational agenda, demonstrating the efficacy of a relational approach to the achievement of a broad range of educational outcomes.

By applying Relational Thinking - a framework of thought and a system of political economy which challenges both individualism and materialism - and measuring the quality of relationships with a robust empirical tool, we aim to build 'relational capital' in the lives of students, teachers, families and communities by supporting positive and evidence-based change in:

- the way schools are organised;
- the way schools conduct their practice with respect to teaching, learning, leadership and management; and
- the way system-level organisations and authorities influence school practice through policy or regulation.

Our vision is to improve society by strengthening the quality of relationships between people, starting with children in schools.

We will create our vision through the achievement of our mission, which is to help build 'relational capital' in schools by carrying out high quality research and consultancy activity, campaigning and fundraising, and engaging people in relational networks.

Our strategy

- Our research will demonstrate the efficacy of a more relational approach in the leadership and management of schools and in the practice of teaching, and generate evidence to show the positive impact of a relational approach on young people, their communities, and wider society
- Our intervention services will improve the quality of relationships in all schools touched by our work, and leave them with strengthened relational capital, capability and capacity
- Our campaigns will promote the importance of good relationships in the achievement of key educational and social outcomes to the UK and international schools sector
- Our networks of relational schools, relational teachers, and international partners, will influence both practice and policy
- Our fundraising activity will ensure financial health and sustainability, and further the achievement of our mission

We have an exclusive license to apply the Relational Proximity Framework - a validated tool that provides us with empirical data on how well one person engages with the thinking, emotions and behaviour of another - in the education sector. As both parties communicate their perceptions of the relationship, it is possible to explore perception gaps and suggest how the relationship can be positively influenced and developed. It also provides an index by which schools can be compared within education systems and internationally.

For more, see: www.relationalschools.org

“In a sector that talks about evidence-based practice, a lot of the evidence being used is weak, and is used to promote a certain ideology. Relational Schools stood out to us as able to offer an independent and robust empirical test to see if what we do works. The process was simple, unobtrusive, and enjoyable, and allowed our staff and students to reflect deeply on the purpose of what we do.”

- Gwyn ap Harri, CEO, XP School Trust

About your researchers



Dr Robert Loe is the Director of the Relational Schools Foundation. Having worked in education for over eighteen years with a range of leadership roles in schools throughout Essex and Cambridgeshire, Rob founded Relational Schools Project in 2014. He researches, writes and speaks on the importance of fostering positive relationships between key stakeholders in schools.



Samuel Verbi is an Associate, supporting RSF’s research programme. He has worked as a professional researcher since graduating with a Masters in Sociology in 2015, and has experience in both the UK and US. He has a passion to use research to authentically tell the stories that matter.



Ben Gibbs leads RSF’s intervention work, working with schools to create positive relational change in their culture, organisation and practice. He has taught, worked in educational policy and assessment, and consulted on curriculum, leadership and organisational strategy. He holds postgraduate qualifications in teaching, educational leadership and organisation development.