

Restorative Principles in Practice:

Partnership with Pupils



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Why Partnership?

From one perspective, the process of educating young people seems to be envisioned as similar to the process of filling a container with water. The educator is the one filling the container, and the pupil is the one having their store of knowledge (their water level) constantly topped up and measured at frequent intervals. From this perspective, the focus of education is on learning and teaching.

From another perspective, young people are regarded as active participants in the learning process. Their education will involve interacting with each other and with adults in school and at home in activities such as experimenting, imitating, creating meaning and performing. This is a process that involves respecting each student for 'who they are' as well as for 'who they are becoming'. From this perspective, the focus of education is on learning and development.

Restorative practice is firmly on the side of the second perspective in which learning and development are viewed primarily as social rather than individual processes. The importance of social interaction involves giving a high priority to building and maintaining respectful and appreciative relationships among all participants in the education process – a partnership among pupils, school staff and families.

Why Restorative Practice?

When restorative practice becomes part of the routines and rituals in a school, pupils will be learning from their experience of engaging in respectful and collaborative relationships. The practice of restorative principles provides a natural space for connecting everyone in a school community and for generating learning and development when there are significant or difficult events happening.

The word 'behaviour' has become prevalent in education and the use of this term has had effects that are often hidden from view. A pupil and their behaviour are often regarded as identical, and a pupil's ability to act differently in different situations is often not acknowledged. Assumptions about 'what a child is like' can have a significant influence on what outcomes are possible.

In restorative practice, there is an assumption that everyone is constantly performing different roles in their interactions with others, and each person is capable of unique and creative contributions. In fostering relationships that are open, curious and respectful, language is important in focussing on the role an individual plays rather than on anything 'about' that individual. There is a focus on outcomes rather than on individual characteristics. The aim is to build relationships in which young people and staff may be partners in learning.



In building relationships of partnership within a school community, the two main restorative practices are:

- o Community-building
- o Restorative dialogue

These practices help to build an environment in which each person is respected as an active participant in their learning and development. These practices also build social and emotional abilities such as:

- Self-confidence
- Self-respect and respect for others
- Social awareness and sensitivity
- Understanding and empathy for others
- Personal and social responsibility
- A willingness to take initiative
- An ability to learn from mistakes and make amends
- An ability to co-operate with others
- Acceptance and appreciation of social differences
- A sense of humour

Community-building

The activity of building connection and community creates an environment in which individuals are learning about others and learning about themselves. They will be active rather than passive in the learning process.

Restorative schools use circle 'go-arounds' to develop a sense of community within classrooms. Pupils can become skilled at leading circles and supporting protocols of good practice. For example, it is good practice for the person convening a circle to speak first, modelling a suitable response in terms of length and content.

Go-arounds suggested by pupils include:

- What is your favourite animal?
- If you could have a super power what would it be?
- If you found £50 what would you do with it?
- Describe your best friend in just 3 words.



The process of building community with circle go-arounds, and the process of actively leading the circle, will create benefits such as:

- Individuals become more confident about speaking
- Individuals learn about other people
- There is a growing sense of connection and belonging within the group
- There is acceptance and appreciation of difference
- Each person learns to listen respectfully and to take turns at speaking
- Individuals become more sensitive to the views of others
- Being part of something bigger than the individual creates loyalty and a wish to please rather than displease other people in the group

A key principle in building community involves the practice of relating to others of different age, ability, gender, race or religion with a sense of unconditional regard. When difficulties arise, it is the difficulty and not the person that is the problem. A sense of partnership is created through the process of building a learning community that is inclusive, accountable and respectful.

Restorative Dialogue

When people engage in a restorative conversation, the aim is not to discover a truth or make a judgment about who is right or wrong. Rather, the aim is to jointly create shared understanding about the way in which words or actions have affected others. This is a learning process that can generate new possibilities for speaking and acting differently in the future.

Restorative dialogue provides and builds an environment in which individuals feel safe and able to acknowledge the part they have played in what has happened. When individuals are valued and not judged, they are able to reflect on how their actions have affected others, and on the choices they are able to make to show their concern and restore their relationships.

Pupils are well placed to engage with other young people in restorative conversations. They will be acting from a position that does not include the inevitable power difference between adults and young people. Learning about restorative conversations will be relevant for everyone in the school community and some pupils will wish to take additional responsibility to lead these conversations.

Creating Awareness with all Pupils

Schools will aim to provide information and learning for all pupils with regard to restorative principles and practices. Assemblies and classroom discussions will help to clarify the principles that underpin restorative practice. Key principles include:

- Respect for difference
- Valuing all individuals equally
- Ensuring everyone has a voice and everyone is heard
- Responding to individuals as relational beings – we all affect each other
- Maintaining a distinction in language between respect for the person and creative responses to words and actions



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It will be important to link these principles to the purpose of restorative practices. For example, in circle go-arounds, staff may explain the purpose of the go-around in terms of valuing everyone, respecting similarities and differences, or ensuring everyone has a voice and everyone is heard.

When explaining the purpose of restorative dialogue, schools have made use of imaginative materials. For example, two books have been written about the story of the wolf and the three little pigs – one book is written from the perspective of the pigs and one from the perspective of the wolf. Hearing and discussing these stories will help young people to realise there are always at least two ways of looking at any situation and it is important that everyone has a voice.

Another useful story is the legend of Gelert. This story concerns a dog called Gelert whose owner returns from hunting to find his baby missing, the cradle overturned, and the dog with a blood-smeared mouth. Believing the dog had savaged his baby, the man draws his sword and kills it. After the dog's dying yelp, he hears the cries of the baby, unharmed under the cradle, along with a dead wolf which had attacked the baby and been killed by Gelert.

This story helps young people realise it is wise not to jump to conclusions and make judgments before hearing from all sides. Restorative dialogue is a non-judgmental process in which all individuals are valued equally. It involves conversation that gives priority to the process of learning in creating the product of knowing.

Following discussion and experience of the practices of community-building and restorative dialogue, pupils may be invited to create posters to be displayed around the school – promoting shared understanding and support for restorative practice.

When restorative principles are demonstrated through the way in which all adults and young people interact with each other, a sense of mutual respect and partnership will be created in the school community.

In some schools, there will be opportunities for pupils to develop their restorative abilities and to play a more prominent role in developing a culture of partnership in their school. Some examples of the roles pupils may adopt are as follows:

School Leaders

Pupils who are Restorative Leaders strive to build positive relationships with their peers and they are actively involved in community events and school development processes. They can provide a pupil voice that is representative of the whole school. School Leaders are assigned to classes throughout the school and have many opportunities to develop relationships with their linked class. They may lead circles in these classes and help support their peers in making positive social connections. Restorative Leaders can be ambassadors for the school.



Playground Leaders

Playground Leaders plan and lead games during playtimes and wet playtimes. They develop positive connections with their peers and they are friendly, fun and inclusive in their approach. When dealing with issues on the playground, the role of playground leaders is to act as a neutral go-between, enabling all involved to resolve situations and rebuild relationships. When it is not possible to resolve issues, playground leaders will refer an incident to a duty teacher or to a member of staff who has been trained in providing a restorative response.

Restorative Leaders and Rookies

This role is taken on to enable whole school succession planning. Initially the oldest children in the school are trained in Restorative Practices and they have a whole school responsibility to support pupils - assisting on the playground, in the lunch hall and during golden time. Younger children in the school, known as Rookies, are also trained and then paired up with a Restorative Leader. The Rookies develop their skills further by working alongside the Restorative Leader in helping to resolve issues, acting as a 'play buddy' on the playground, and giving their peers an opportunity to talk through any issues, worries or concerns they may have. At the end of the academic year, the Rookie Leaders become the new Restorative Leaders.



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Supporting Leaders in their role

The success of Restorative Leaders requires careful planning. It is helpful for pupils to begin their role at the start of a new academic year with selection and training best done during the summer term in preparation for September.

It is important for everyone in the school community to be aware of the role being adopted by Restorative Leaders. An introduction at a whole school assembly in September will ensure this happens.

Restorative Leaders often wear special badges, lanyards or sashes to identify their role. Regular opportunities to meet as a group are provided in order to share good practice, discuss concerns, and review their developing role.

In school assemblies, it is important that the commitment of Restorative Leaders is recognised with awards for outstanding contributions to the school community.

What do Restorative Pupil Leaders give to a school?

- They provide a positive role model
- They have an influential role in promoting strong relationships in the school community
- They offer a practical commitment to ensuring there is a safe learning environment for all pupils
- They help all pupils to feel included
- They provide support at specific times of the school day e.g. playtimes, circles, assemblies, open days
- They help fellow pupils to talk about issues of concern and when necessary they support pupils with putting things right
- They are ambassadors for the school's core values of respect, inclusion, fairness and responsibility

What do Restorative Pupil Leaders gain from their role?

- They build confidence and self-esteem by helping to improve their school
- They develop their own abilities through the process of giving help and support to others
- They learn how to build and maintain good relationships
- They receive positive feedback from fellow pupils and from staff who acknowledge and appreciate their efforts
- Their experience of acting differently in different situations enables young people to appreciate how they may create learning for themselves and for others
- They learn how listening and talking can ease tension and help to resolve conflict
- They develop qualities of respect, inclusion, fairness and responsibility



Conclusions

A relationship of partnership does not mean creating an environment where taking risks and making mistakes are avoided. Partnership is like being a member of the same sports team. Ideally, everyone takes responsibility for the team's success and no one is blamed when things go wrong. Learning involves doing what people are not able to do – this involves taking risks and making mistakes. The practice of restorative principles creates a supportive learning environment where young people feel safe to experiment and get things wrong in the process of developing new social, emotional and academic abilities.

Restorative practices support adults and young people to become partners in a learning process that involves trying new skills, reflecting on feedback, being part of a group, appreciating differences, listening, and when necessary, putting things right. This is a process in which learning is inextricably linked with development.

Information in Parts 2 and 3 of this Resource

The training materials contained in Part 2 of this Pupil Partnership Resource provide a structure for the training and support of Pupil Leaders by members of staff who have received training from The Restorative Foundation. Part 3 will provide resources for pupils in these schools at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

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Published by: Pont Books (Sept. 2014)

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