

Practice profile:

Richard Hendry, National Coordinator of *Sacro's Work with Schools talks about Restorative Practice.

(*Sacro: Safeguarding Communities, Reducing Conflict)

Richard is the author of Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice (2009)

How does your day begin? Full breakfast or coffee on the run?

Every day is different. As a consultant I can work from home some days. I'm a bit of a slow starter but orange juice, toast and coffee is usually enough to get me moving.

What does Restorative Practice do for people?

At the core of all of restorative approaches lies an opportunity to build or repair constructive relationships. We know the quality of the relationships that children experience at school is a significant factor in their attainment as well as in their broader learning at school. In restorative interventions the focus is on helping individuals to take responsibility for their actions and to identify and commit to helpful future behaviours.

Before looking at how Restorative Practice can support learning and teaching in schools, it is important to emphasise that the term Restorative Practice covers a wide range of proactive and responsive approaches that school staff and children can learn to use.

Mediation and in particular Peer Mediation, is often described as one kind of Restorative Approach. Peer Mediation is a pupil-led process whereas the Restorative Interventions that I will tell you something about are usually led by staff.

Tell us about your front-line work.

Sacro work with school communities to help them develop restorative interventions that resolve conflict or address wrongdoing, whilst supporting all those involved. Here are some examples that are currently being used in some Scottish schools. As with all restorative interventions, participation is voluntary.

Example 1: A Restorative Conversation. A pupil is persistently late and is disrupting the learning of others in the class.

A Restorative Conversation (sometimes called Restorative Enquiry) is the brief dialogue that an adult might have with a child whose behaviour has disrupted their own learning or that of others in a low-level manner. The staff member uses questions, summarising and affirmation to facilitate the conversation in order to help the child think about: what has been happening (*the past*); who has been affected (*the consequences*); what needs to be done to address the concern (*the future*). Typical questions will include: Can you tell me what has happened? Who has been affected? How/in what way have they been affected? What can be done to put this right/make amends? What needs to happen in the future? This conversation will include an opportunity to identify how the staff member can support the child with putting things right and with any commitments to future behaviours.

Example 2: A Problem-Solving Circle. Several pupils are regularly having difficulty settling to tasks and this is interfering with learning in the whole class.

This approach allows all those involved and affected in a complex situation to work collaboratively towards a mutually agreed solution by making individual commitments to future actions or behaviours.

For low-level concerns the class teacher may run the circle. For more serious or complex problems, and for situations that require the teacher to contribute to the solution, another adult may facilitate - with the class teacher participating as a member of the circle.

The person running the circle will first work with the class to encourage all to feel that they are in control of both the process and the outcomes by encouraging everyone to:

- Identify and agree ground rules for the running of the circle, including appropriate turn-taking.
- Describe their experience of the problem/concern, including what they are thinking and feeling and how they have been affected.
- Be honest about their contributions to the problem whilst avoiding a 'naming and blaming' approach.
- Suggest and, where appropriate, commit to reasonable solutions.

As it is a voluntary process, individuals should not feel pressured into talking if they do not wish to. Depending on the level of the concern and on how harmed individuals are feeling, there may well be a need for preparation with individuals or sub-groups before running the full circle. There may also be agreement to follow up this circle with further sessions.

Example 3: A Restorative Conference. *An argument between two pupils over a minor issue has escalated to the point where one pupil has physically hurt the other while in school. A full fight was averted by the intervention of a member of staff.*

Restorative Conferences involve not only those responsible for causing harm and those who have been harmed, but also relevant 'supporters' of those involved. In the case of children, the supporters would usually be the parents/carers. For staff the supporter may be a colleague. Typically each child and their supporter would be met with separately and taken through an assessment and preparation process to make sure that bringing them face-to-face was mutually agreed, safe and appropriate.

At the conference the facilitator (or sometimes two) will take the participants through a carefully structured process where those responsible for causing harm will have an opportunity to 'own up' to this and to hear about the impact of their actions on all involved. Those who have been harmed will have a chance to say what they are looking for in terms of future actions, for example some kind of reparation and/or apology. Commitment to future behaviours will be recorded in a formal plan. This may include agreeing to additional supports to address related concerns. Sacro have recently been involved in facilitating this type of intervention at the request of schools. This process is very similar to that currently offered by many Youth Justice Services to children and young people involved in offending and their 'victims'.

Are there other approaches?

Other restorative interventions that schools can use include adult mediation, Restorative face-to-face Meetings (with a facilitator and just the two people involved – otherwise similar to a full conference), and shuttle dialogue - where it is not safe or appropriate to bring people face-to-face, in which case a facilitator meets separately with the individuals involved and takes information between them.

What's the impact? How do you get it right?

Evidence from Scottish schools has shown that Restorative Practice can help schools reduce and even remove the need for punitive responses and exclusion, particularly where the whole school embraces the values, thinking, skills and processes involved. Schools developing restorative approaches need to involve their pupils and parents effectively in this development if confusion and misunderstanding are to be avoided. If schools are going to use these approaches safely and sensitively then their staff will need appropriate training.

Who provides support or training about this work?

In addition to Sacro's involvement, Restorative Practice work with schools is supported by the Scottish Government's Positive Behaviour Team, the Scottish Mediation Network and a number of private consultancies. Restorative Practice is also being developed through other sectors and support services including Social Work, Youth and Adult Justice, Community Mediation, the Police and various homelessness and intergenerational projects. As the development of restorative approaches in these sectors is relatively new, it is only recently

that inter-agency links have started to be made in order to offer a more consistent and coherent restorative experience for service users across Scotland's communities.

More information

- PINS 'What Is?' series provides basic information about key policy and practice issues. See our information on [What is restorative practice?](#)
- Richard Hendry is also author of **Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice** (2009). Published by Routledge, London ISBN-10: 0415544270
- For more information on Sacro's work with schools:
Web site: www.sacro.org.uk
Email: richard@hoolet.com

Nov 2009



SUPPORTING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR WORK WITH PUPILS
WHO ARE VULNERABLE, DISSAFFECTED OR EXCLUDED