Restorative Approaches

There is something of a difficulty when it comes to defining restorative approaches (RA). As Johnson and Van Ness (2007) have remarked, restorative justice (from which RA has evolved) is an essentially contested concept. That is, like art and indeed peace itself, people assume there is a generally shared understanding of its meaning, despite a multiplicity of different ways of thinking about it. Whilst on the one hand this can be frustrating, it can also be invigorating. The fact that it is essentially contested allows the concept to remain dynamic and subject to debate and renewal.

Given that restorative approaches in schools have evolved from restorative justice (RJ), it is important to trace the history of RJ in order to understand what RA is, and how it has come to be adopted so widely in schools across the world in a relatively short space of time. There are fuller accounts of the history of restorative justice elsewhere (e.g. Liebmann, 2007), but here, we present an overview of the evolution RJ, with the aim of bringing clarity rather than comprehensiveness.

RJ has been called an ancient practice with a modern name, which refers to the fact that current restorative practice has its roots in the justice perspectives and practices of indigenous communities across the planet. These indigenous roots are one of three prime antecedents of what is today known as RJ; the other two being the foundational theoretical work of Nils Christie and Howard Zehr; and the ground-level activities of practitioners such as Yantzi and Thorsborne.

The first of these, the indigenous roots of RJ, is fairly well established, although various authors argue about whether or not the indigenous roots of RJ are evidence of its essential universality, or a romanticisation of human history (e.g. Braithwaite, 1993; Weitekamp, 1999). What is fairly uncontested is that RJ is influenced by rites and traditions that trace back to ancient ways of engaging with wrongdoing and justice, such as those of the Māori people and the First Nations communities (Pranis, Stuart & Wedge, 2003). David Carruthers (2013) provides an interesting insight into some of the constructs within the Māori worldview that can be seen to be fundamental within restorative practice. For example, the Māori concept of *mana* contains the idea of the prestige or agency of an individual, which is what needs to be restored following an incident of harm. The First Nation Navajo conceptualisation of justice is founded on the restoration of harmony, so that rather than seeking to blame and punish those who have caused harm, the prime aim is to meet the needs of the victim and restore their wellbeing, and at the same time restore and reintegrate the wrongdoer into the community (Sia, 2013). These indigenous roots of RJ have informed the foundations and principles of RJ.

The second important antecedent to RJ is the writings of Howard Zehr and Nils Christie. Norwegian criminologist, Nils Christie's 1977 paper, *Conflicts as Property*, has come to be seen as highly influential in the evolution of RJ. In this paper he makes the argument that, "conflicts…ought to be

used, and become useful, for those originally involved in the conflict" (p. 1) rather than appropriated by, "professional thieves" such as lawyers (p. 3). Howard Zehr, writing from a Mennonite perspective, drew on Christie's contributions in formulating the restorative justice paradigm, which he set in contrast to the retributive justice paradigm (1985). He later articulated three foundational principles of restorative justice in his now seminal work, *Changing Lenses.* These are that: "Crime is a violation of people and relationships"; that "it creates obligations to make things right"; and that, "justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance" (1990: 183). Christie and Zehr are two of the most widely acknowledged and cited informers of contemporary RJ. They helped to establish the theoretical perspectives on which the field is based. It was the activities of practitioners on the ground in different parts of the world, however, that played a crucial role in bringing RJ into action.

In 1974, in Ontario, Canada, the first application of restorative justice was documented. After two young offenders vandalised 22 properties in a small Ontario town, the assigned probation officer, Mark Yantzi and a Mennonite prison support worker, Dave Worth, asked the judge for permission to arrange for the two offenders to meet with the victims of the vandalism in order to see if reparations could be made. In 1994 in Queensland, Australia school guidance counsellor, Margaret Thorsborne, collaborated with police officers to deal with an incident where three students from Maroochydore State High School assaulted another student following a school dance in a gang-related incident. The restorative conference that Marg Thorsborne facilitated under advice from the local police officers paved the way for the now burgeoning restorative approaches in schools movement (O'Connell, 1998).

RA in schools can be understood as, "a philosophy, in action, that places the relationship at the heart of the educational experience" (Corrigan, 2012). Philosophically, RA represent a way of thinking about human behaviour (and misbehaviour) as an expression of needs. RA posits that when wrongdoing occurs, as it inevitably will, then repairing the harm done is more important than dispensing punishment; it places the person harmed at the centre of its thinking. It further suggests that the needs of the person who has been harmed will be most effectively met by being an active participant in the ensuing process of resolution. Furthermore, RA involves identifying and meeting the needs of the person who has caused the harm, as well as the person who has been harmed. This is novel in two respects. First, schools traditionally have focused all of their attention on the wrongdoer and have ignored the plight of the person who has been wronged. Secondly, schools have traditionally framed the wrongdoer as bad and therefore not deserving of understanding or support. Working restoratively seeks to attend to the needs of all parties, including the needs of the community.

This alternative perspective on wrongdoing requires that different questions be asked of the person who has caused harm, the person who has been harmed, and the community to which those people

belong. Instead of focusing primarily, or even exclusively, on the person who has done wrong through a process of blaming, shaming and punishing, RA require teachers and others to invite the person who has been harmed into a process of inquiry and dialogue. RA offer tools that facilitate processes of inquiry, reflection and dialogue with both parties individually and potentially together. The aims of this way of thinking about and working with conflict are to meet the needs of the person harmed, to hold the person who has caused the harm to account, and give them a supported opportunity to put things right. This enables both parties are to move on from the incident with their respective sense of dignity and agency (mana) restored.

Practically, RA incorporates a number of specific interventions that can be employed to deal with negative behaviours and conflicts, and to promote positive behaviour and relationships among members of the school community. All manifestations of RA have at their core a set of questions that put into practice the philosophy described above:

- What harm has been done?
- What needs has this harm created?
- Whose responsibility is it to address these needs, and how can they be enabled to do this?

Schools employ RA in the whole spectrum of contexts: staff may engage individual pupils in a ‘restorative chat’ in class, in the corridor or on the playground for low-level incidents of harm; students may be sent to a ‘reflection room’ when they are not able or willing to meet the expectations of the classroom; a ‘classroom conference’ may be convened to address harmful behaviours or relationships within the group; a ‘community conference’ may be convened for serious incidents of harm. In this way, schools and school staff can adapt the practice to suit their context. What underpins all restorative work is the values and principles that are expressed through the questions asked and through the attitude to wrongdoing and relationships that is adopted.

RA can be applied as part of our behaviour development framework (see the Peace-keeping chapter). As a behaviour development intervention, RA seeks to enable and encourage the person who is responsible for causing the harm to come to a fuller understanding of what they did and how people were affected by their actions, with the aim of building their capacity to better manage their feelings, their behaviour and their relationships in the future. This aim is one aspect of the additional claim of RA to promote people’s personal, social and emotional capabilities. The rationale for this is that actively engaging parties involved in an incident of conflict in a process of reflection, dialogue and resolution develops specific personal, social and emotional competencies, such as awareness of one’s own feelings and understanding of how they link to one’s behaviour, perspective-taking, empathy, problem-solving and moral reasoning.

Beyond being a peace-making process, and a behaviour development process, RA has also been identified as having the potential to transform whole school ethos and culture to one with a strong focus on care and positive relations. Kane et al. reported in their evaluation of RA across 18 Scottish schools that it could serve as, "a vehicle by which schools could develop a more positive ethos…a means of giving coherence and identity to established good practices and of further enhancing those practices" (2009: 248). In this way, RA can serve as a means for school change, or even as a catalyst to generate a more relational school culture. It is in this way that RA can cross the boundary from peace-making (in terms of the mechanisms and activities it enables) to peace-building. In this, it is a vehicle for proactively creating a school culture that privileges collaborative problem solving, care and compassion.

Recently, some authors have gone further with their claims for the potential of RA in schools. As restorative practice in schools matures, so some are beginning to call for a, "radical, holistic version of RP" (McCluskey, 2013: 133). They see the opportunity for this values-based practice to bring to light, and to challenge, structural and cultural violence in schools. Dorothy Vaandering claims a critical role for RA in schools in confronting inequitable and unjust school cultures and practices. As she reports from her own research with school staff:

> What began as a strategy that they anticipated would respect students who had been harmed and caused harm, turned into a reflective practice that challenged educators to examine how the institutional structure itself, all its policies and practices, the curriculum and pedagogy, sent messages that honored or measured school participants. (2011: 323-4)

Vaandering draws a broad distinction between a focus on *measuring* pupils and staff (through testing and inspecting) and *honouring* pupils and staff through a more relational focus. The task of transforming structural and culturally violent systems of schooling can feel overwhelming (and we do not suggest here that hard-pressed, put-upon school staff should be expected to remedy the ills of society), but we do seek to raise questions about the wider potential of RA, and new possibilities for creating transformative moments in schools. New spaces are indeed opening up as people engage with restorative practice in schools in increasingly creative and critical ways.

The evidence base for RA in schools provides useful information about the implementation of the practice (in terms of the conditions that are required to put this into practice effectively) and also about its impact (about the outcomes of implementing RA in schools). Implementation evidence reports that there are certain indicators of readiness for a school to adopt a restorative approach. These include: the full and informed commitment of the senior leadership team; a vision that is aligned with restorative values and principles; high quality training tailored to the needs of the school; and engagement with all members of the school community in order to understand what restorative approaches will mean in any particular context (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013).

Evidence on the more readily measurable impacts of restorative practice in school settings is summarised in Table 7.1 below:

Table 7.1 Research Evidence on Impact of Restorative Approaches in Schools (from Skinns et al, 2009; McCluskey et al, 2008; Golding, 2013; Bevington, 2015).

REDUCED	**INCREASED**	**IMPROVED**
• Incidents of misbehaviour • Violence and bullying • Exclusions	• Teaching time • Safety • Connectedness to school	• Climate for learning • Social and emotional skills • Relationships among all members of the school

In summary, the various ways of applying RA to school practice, from conflict resolution to behaviour development to transforming school culture, can be aligned with the levels of violence articulated by Galtung. As a conflict resolution strategy, RA can serve to address and resolve incidents of direct violence. As behaviour development, it can address some aspects of structural violence in schools by providing experiences for pupils (and staff) to develop skills and characteristics that can help them to better achieve their potential. The higher level of application of RA to transform school culture provides intriguing possibilities for responding creatively to cultural violence. When a school refocuses its attention onto the quality and functioning of relationships, it can enable a mind-shift in individuals, and a culture-shift in the institution.

From: Cremin, H. & Bevington, T. (2017). *Positive Peace in Schools: Tackling Conflict and Creating a Culture of Peace in the Classroom (pp. 90-94).* Abingdon: Routledge.