

## An Evaluation Following the Introduction of Restorative Practice in Comparative School Settings

This research identifies the principles of restorative practice; exploring the historical and contemporary context as well as the relevant theories and concepts. The appropriate terminology is highlighted together with previous research and its limitations. The significance of restorative practice in school settings is introduced and explored through this research. The objectives of this research are to analyse the models and strategies applied within restorative practice and to identify the barriers to implementation in school settings. The impact of this practice on pupils, staff and the wider school environment will also be explored together with an evaluation of the effectiveness in improving behaviour and conflict resolution.

**Keywords:** restorative practice; evaluation; impact; effectiveness

### INTRODUCTION

The application of restorative practice in schools is becoming increasingly popular in many different countries including the UK. Many schools and wider education authorities are already experiencing success following the introduction of restorative practice. Some are sharing this success and are involved in training other schools and authorities.

There are many aspects of restorative practice and its impact can influence different fields within education such as truancy, conflict resolution, mediation and behaviour management. A key principle in its practice is in ownership by all parties involved; promoting and supporting responsibility which leads to an atmosphere where resolution can then occur.

X City Council has been using restorative practice in Youth Offending Services and has been experiencing success for those parties involved. This approach is now being extended across all services involved with children. X City Council Children's Services are promoting the use of Restorative Practice across all agencies including schools, with an aim to create a 'Child Friendly City'.

This research will evaluate the impact on staff, pupils and the wider school environment of the introduction of restorative practice in comparative school settings.

Contributions from X Children's Services, X High School and X Primary School have been collected and analysed for the purpose of this research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Historical context**

The use of restorative practice in schools is becoming increasingly popular and is seen, by many, as an alternative to more traditional retributive practices. Whilst restorative practice is relatively new in the field of education, application in other areas has been widespread for a number of years.

The roots of restorative practice can be traced back to ancient indigenous and spiritual traditions, where restitution was key in the search for justice (Howard, 2009; Vaandering, 2010). This history has encouraged interest in many countries in the use of restorative practices, particularly as an alternative to retributive methods. The historical background of many countries has influenced many to reflect on the positive aspects of seeking restoration over seeking retribution. Australia, for example, has progressed from the use of corporal punishment in schools, then to exclusions and suspensions, to now actively using restorative methods as a tool to work with pupils who demonstrate negative, harmful behaviour (Cameron, 1999; McClusky, 2008).

The use of restorative practices in schools has not, however, developed directly from these ancient traditions, but has been more specifically influenced by its use in the criminal justice system (McClusky, 2008). Vaandering (2010) recalls how in Canada, in 1970, two youths involved in vandalism were successfully brought face to face with their victims as an alternative to a court hearing. It was reported that this act of restorative justice was successful. Police forces have incorporated restorative principles, with Youth Offending Teams being particularly involved (Howard, 2009; Youth Justice Board, 2004a). This has facilitated the transfer of restorative practice into educational establishments, as local councils have recognised the benefits of adopting and applying these principles in schools (YJB, 2004a; Hull, 2012; Kane et. al., 2008). Some local authorities are going one step further and striving to become

'restorative authorities' and implementing restorative practice across all agencies and departments (Hopkins, 2007; Hull, 2012).

### **Contemporary Context**

The move from restorative practice in the judicial system into schools has been fuelled initially by stories of success (Vaandering, 2010). Brown (2001), Howard (2009), McClusky (2008), Cameron (1999) and Hull (2012) all share evidence of the positive experiences and benefits of employing restorative practice in schools in the United Kingdom.

As more local authorities and schools are introducing and developing restorative practice, it is apparent that the motives driving these initiatives are varied. Whilst there is evidence from many sources of the effects and successes, the lack of uniformity across those establishments, in all aspects of restorative practice, is clear. Hopkins (2007) highlights that all parties involved in developing restorative justice in schools do not have the same agenda or desired end result.

The increase in interest to build social and emotional intelligence (Morrison, 2006; Saarni, 1997) has provided an atmosphere conducive to establishing restorative practice in schools. Most schools already teach some aspect of personal and social development, through SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) or some other initiative (DCSF, 2008; Hopkins, 2007). The employment of Learning Mentors to support the emotional well being of pupils also demonstrates the importance schools are placing on this aspect of learning (DFES, 2005).

The main reason for engaging in restorative practice is as a way to combat anti-social behaviour and its effects (Hopkins, 2007), which is prevalent in schools. To be able to manage negative behaviour, and the difficulty it causes to all parties, is desired to ensure positive outcomes for the individuals involved (Ambrose, 2012; Cameron, 1999; Hull, 2012). It is reported that exclusions, suspensions and physical interventions can be reduced by the implementation of restorative practice (Brown, 2001; Howard, 2009; Vaandering, 2010).

Although there appears to be an increase in the desire to make a "paradigm shift from a more traditional retributive approach to restorative approach" (Zehr in Hopkins, 2007, p.5), the complexity of transferring the practice into schools is

evident. A simplistic desire is not sufficient and the theoretical evidence to support this is still limited.

### **Theories and Concepts**

Through exploration of different theoretical perspectives, understanding of restorative practice and its development in schools can be deepened. Restorative practice is a person-centred perspective (McClusky, 2008) which is directed by the importance of the relationships of the individual.

The success of restorative practice, however, depends on the role of another who 'scaffolds' or provides support to enable the individual to come to an understanding and realisation themselves (Wood, Bruner and Ross in Macready, 2009). This collaboration, in organising the correct environment, allows an individual to move from one level of understanding to another so that progression can be made. Without the correct level of support, progress cannot effectively occur; too little, and the individual is unable to recognise what is needed; too much, and the progress is falsely achieved and less likely to be sustained.

This principle is similar to the social discipline window (Watchel, O'Connell, Watchel, 2010), which focuses on providing an environment of both support and control. Obtaining the correct balance of support and control is vital in obtaining positive outcomes. More importantly, the incorrect balance of support and control can affect an individual's sense of well being, which affects future interactions and relationships (Vaandering 2010). This perspective allows a broader response to misbehaviour. A high control and low support situation is conducive to a punitive approach where the individual plays no part in resolving the issue. However, by providing support and the correct level of control, an individual can work, alongside others, to resolve the situation. Rather than a punishment being decided by someone in authority taking all the control, the individual can be helped to recognise the consequence of actions and take ownership of resolving the situation. Simply put, working *with*, rather than doing *for* or *to* (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2012).

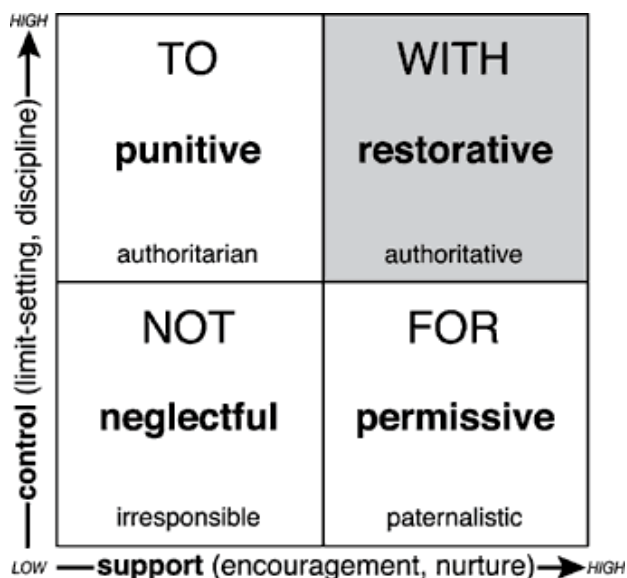


Figure 1 - The Social Discipline Window

In understanding how the social discipline window operates successfully, it is important that the role of relationships is fully appreciated. Watchel (in Vaandering 2010) states that people have an inherent need for relationships and that nurturing an individual's sense of worth is essential in ensuring that the correct environment of control and support is successful. This delicate balance of nurturing the self-worth of the individual and providing control and support is essential if restorative practice is to be effective, specifically relating to the future positive outcomes of the individual. What is unclear from this perspective is whether all individuals need the same levels of control and support in order to be successful and whether it is possible, in a school environment, to vary the level of control and support for each individual as appropriate. For example, in a large school, is it manageable for all members of staff to know which individual pupils, need what specific levels of control and support?

The use of shame, in restorative practice, is identified as "a feeling when we fail to live up to expectation" (McClusky, 2008, p.204). Whether that expectation is the individual's or someone else's is not clarified. This would affect the concept of shame; when the consideration is to please or not disappoint another. Masters (in Cameron, 1999) study of re-integrative shaming in Japanese schools does highlight that there is emphasis from teachers of the obligations and accountabilities that pupils have towards each other but again it is unclear whether these obligations and

accountabilities are thrust upon the pupils or whether they play an active part in agreeing them.

Braithwaite's (1989) theory of re-integrative shaming delves deeper and breaks shame into two categories: stigmatized shaming and re-integrative shaming. With stigmatized shaming, the emphasis is on the individual, who is not seen as a good person, who has acted wrongfully and is treated negatively by others as someone who has done wrong. Re-integrative shaming focuses on the individual as a good person who has done something wrong. When the negative deed has been addressed, emphasis is made to help the individual recognise they are valued. The issues of respect, empathy and judgement are demonstrated as opposites in these two categories of shame. It is evident that the focus is on the *act* in stigmatized shaming whilst re-integrative shaming focuses on the *individual*. This person centred aspect is central in the role of restorative practice.

Whilst Braithwaite's (1989) theory suggests how shame can influence individuals, as they behave in ways so as not to disappoint those around them, Macready (2009) highlights the difficulties that occur when an individual does not care how their actions and choices impact others. Masters' (in Cameron, 1999, p.7) study of re-integrative shaming also demonstrates a "belief that punishment makes one think only of oneself rather than consequences of own behaviour." Considering this in a school setting, when an individual does not respect their own peers or those who are responsible for providing support, shame may have very little influence. This could impact the initial choice to do wrong and also the way in which the act is dealt with. This behaviour would make effective restorative practice difficult.

### **Terminology**

Whilst restorative practice in schools is being developed from the restorative approach being used in the justice system, the transference of terminology is an issue. It has been expressed whether the term 'restorative justice', as used in the justice system, is appropriate to use in schools (YJB, 2004a). Many have preferred to refer to 'restorative practice' rather than 'restorative justice' (McClusky, 2008; Morrison, 2006; Vaandering, 2010). The name does not change the basic premise but seems to suit the way it is being used in schools; as an approach or set of skills as opposed to sounding like a response to an action. Language such as 'victim' and

'offender', used freely in the judicial system, are not terms that are used in schools to describe pupils (Morrison, 2006). The problem of using these terms is highlighted as it "may reinforce discourse that demonises and criminalises young people in general" (McClusky, 2008 p. 204). Merely referring to a pupil as the 'offender' may hinder the process of healing through communication if it is felt, by the terminology, that opinions have already been formed of the person who has done wrong.

The use of restorative practice in schools is a different approach to dealing with inappropriate behaviour. The more traditional approach of retributive justice occurs as those in appointed positions are given authority and responsibility for deciding what appropriate behaviour is and then managing that behaviour (Vaandering, 2010). Responses to incidents are, "what happened, who started it, what needs to happen to deter and punish" (Hopkins, 2007, p. 7). Punitive measures are put into place to punish those who do not conform to the appointed appropriate behaviour and this is deemed to be a deterrent to the individual and also to others observing the punishment.

By contrast, a restorative approach is concerned with building relationships and "is underpinned by values of empathy, respect, honesty, acceptance, responsibilities and mutual accountability" (Hull, 2012). The focus is on the harm that has been caused as opposed to the negative act itself; harm being defined as the result of rule breaking and any negative behaviour (Hopkins, 2007). The individual is encouraged and supported to put right the wrong and the subsequent harm. The views of all involved parties are listened to and valued as relationships are repaired and resolutions are discussed and agreed. Responsibility is encouraged and the individuals are empowered to act in a proactive manner, to take control of their response to the situation (Macready, 2009).

There are various aspects of delivering restorative practice in schools, which are useful to identify and define. A circle, simply put, is a circle of people who take it in turns to contribute and listen to what is said, usually on a given theme. Whilst the use of circles and circle time have been used for some time in schools (Howard, 2009), it is an extremely useful tool for giving children the time and appropriate environment to talk about their feels and emotions; to them, the things that are bothering them. Circles provide an ideal climate for developing social and emotional

skills through open, safe discussion (Morrison, 2006). Hopkins (in Brown, 2001) states it is the “seedbed of the kind of skills you need if you’re going to develop a restorative approach to justice”. Circles are versatile, in that they can be used in a variety of settings; for either conflict resolution or building relationships, with a range of different staff (teaching or non-teaching) or with children on their own. They are also a positive tool as a staff only tool in building and maintaining positive working relationships (Hull, 2012; Macready, 2009).

Conferences are a step further than circles, in that the participants are invited specifically and are all connected in some way. The individual who has caused harm and the person, or persons, that have been harmed are brought together, along with family or friends, in a supporting role. It is an opportunity for all parties to have a voice (Brown, 2001). This form of intervention is more formal than a circle (Hopkins, 2007) and is directed by an impartial party who facilitates the proceedings. This facilitating role is challenging in that it requires careful preparation, sensitivity and flexibility together with total neutrality. It is vital to ensure that everyone has opportunity to speak. Opinions and solutions should not be offered by the facilitator (Hopkins, 2003) which could present an issue in some schools if the member of staff, acting as facilitator, is familiar with the parties concerned and is influenced by an opinion already formed of those involved. Conferences are often used for more serious incidents or following persistent disruption (Cameron, 1999)

Success of both circles and conferences depend largely on the effectiveness of the facilitator in the use of appropriate questions. Questions need to enable people to reflect, whilst feeling comfortable but yet stretched enough to search their thoughts (White in Macready, 2009; Vaandering, 2010).

### **Previous Research and its Limitations**

The most prominent issue surrounding research is the limited amount of critical theory available linked to current research, particularly relating to the use of restorative practice in schools. Theory is essential in ensuring that the gaps between early and current restorative practice in education are uncovered (Vaandering, 2010). This reflection is vital if restorative practice is to move forward with sustainability; effectively meeting the needs of all those involved. Many studies of restorative practice in schools have their foundations in the criminal justice system



and this needs to be highlighted as to the limitations in fully exploring the effectiveness in schools. Morris (in Vaandering, 2010, p. 165) “advocates for a deeper conceptual understanding” which is essential if restorative practice is to be truly effective. Critical theory is then able to inform and strengthen the current restorative framework as well as sustaining implementation and development (Vaandering, 2010).

It is also important to highlight who has commissioned the research, who it was carried out by, and the reasons behind the research. The research conducted by the Youth Justice Board (2004a) is closely linked to the work of Youth Offending Teams and it is clear that this has impacted on the direction that was taken; primarily acting after an incident has occurred. Hull (2012), states that a commitment to continuity of practice, in order to improve the lives of young people, has driven the development of restorative practice. The International Institute of Restorative Practices (2012) delivers training programmes across the world, and as such, the research undertaken must have been influenced by fiscal means.

This, however, leads to another issue; the identification of whose needs are actually being met by the use of restorative practice. Is restorative practice in schools a tool to ‘transform the current rule-based managerial culture of schools’ (Vaandering, 2010, p. 154) or is its focus developing environments conducive to establishing and building relationships (McClusky, 2010)? In other words, is it about making school life easier for those responsible for managing behaviour or is the focus to really help individual pupils develop successful emotional literacy for themselves and in their interactions with others? Whilst the motives for applying restorative practice in schools are not always clearly understood, critically looking at theory as a separate discipline is much more difficult than using the approach that restorative practice is able to cross multiple disciplines (Vaandering, 2010).

Masters (1998) study of re-integrative shaming (in Cameron, 1999) and the social discipline window (Watchel, 2010) highlights an important issue. Whilst the theories focus on how obligations affect actions and actively engage with support, the relationship between the individual and those in positions of power cannot be ignored. The institutional and structural factors in place in schools must impact the actions of pupils, both with positive and negative outcomes (Vaandering, 2010).

There is also the potential misuse of power in these relationships affecting the effectiveness of restorative practice in schools.

Whilst Hopkins (2003) highlights how research provides the insight that individuals need to feel a sense of belonging and that this helps young people to connect with reflective practices rather than a retributive approach, McClusky (2008) warns that the relationship between retributive and restorative approaches may not be as straightforward as it appears. As already stated, there are many issues that can impact relationships and affect the success of restorative practices and merely swapping from one approach to another is not that simple or indeed a solution to a problem.

### **Significance of Issue**

In X Primary School, restorative practice is being implemented and two staff have attended the relevant training, arranged by the local authority, who is striving “to achieve a more comprehensive implementation across all agencies in the city” (Ambrose, 2012, p1). This is following the lead of many other local authorities, who are prioritising the use of restorative practice in schools (Hopkins, 2007; Howard, 2009; Hull, 2012; Macready, 2009; Youth Justice Board, 2004).

Whilst there have been many indications of the reasons for implementing restorative practice in schools, it is clear that the positive outcomes of this practice are drawing many to adopt, or even strive to replace existing retributive practices. This research of restorative practice will identify the barriers to implementation and sustainability, explore the impact on pupils, staff and the wider school environment and will evaluate the effectiveness on improving behaviour and conflict resolution.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methods used in the research being reported were questionnaires, interviews, observations and examination of documentation. Questionnaires were issued to staff at X Primary School at the beginning and end of the research process. Interviews were conducted with key staff from X Primary School, X Children’s Services and X High School as well as with a parent whose child had taken part in restorative

practice. A series of observations of various restorative methods were also undertaken at X Primary School. Examination of various documents was also undertaken and full details of all these research methods will be discussed and explored further. A combination of methods in this research has been applied in order to provide “a safety net for objectivity, scale and breadth” (Scott, 2006, p.189). Corroboration from multiple research methods also ensures that “reliable inferences are derived from reliable data” (Cohen, 2000, p.315).

## **Questionnaires**

An initial baseline questionnaire was administered to all staff at X Primary School in April 2012. An initial baseline questionnaire was also completed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) (2004) prior to the National Evaluation of Restorative Justice in Schools was commenced. All school staff had participated in a whole staff circle for the first time and a brief questionnaire was designed to ascertain perceptions of this activity particularly with a view to assessing the impact of restorative practice on staff.

A second questionnaire was repeated March 2013 which was intended to be a repetition of the initial baseline; however, various factors prevented the exact questions being repeated. The whole school did not participate in another whole school circle and restorative practice had not been introduced across the entire staff as was initially expected by the researcher. Thus the design of the second school questionnaire was driven by the analysis of the baseline data (Wellington, 2000) whilst paying close attention to the research objective of considering the impact restorative practice has on staff behaviour and perceptions. The second questionnaire also provided an insight into the effectiveness of restorative practice in affecting behaviour and conflict resolution.

Prior to distributing both questionnaires, questions were piloted with a colleague who has prior knowledge of the area of research. Scott (2006) stresses the importance of piloting in the design and construction of questionnaires to ensure any problems of comprehension are eliminated. Piloting is particularly important as the printed word can often raise unforeseen problems which do not occur in spoken contact (Wellington, 2000).

It was determined that questionnaires would be distributed to all staff after the event as this would be a reliable means of reaching all staff at the same time (Edwards, 1994). This method of administration ensured that all the population could be reached; questionnaires could be easily distributed allowing access for explanation or correction of any misunderstandings (Opie, 2004). This method also allows for a high response rate to be achieved (Opie, 2004).

Both questionnaires were kept brief with only four questions on each as well as clear instructions. Adequate space was provided to ensure responses were limited which also suggested to the respondent the level of detail required in each response (Blaxter 1996). Whilst only four questions were used in each questionnaire, it was important to ensure that the appropriate types of questions were used. Leading or loaded questions were avoided as were those that restricted full responses. Wellington (2000) also highlights the importance of not combining questions with expected answers or combining opposite positions in one question. Questions which rely on existing specialist knowledge were also avoided as it cannot be assumed that all respondents possess the same levels of subject specific understanding (Blaxter, 1996).

When considering whether closed or open questions were appropriate for this research, different factors were taken into account. Whilst closed questions are often easier to answer, respondents may feel frustrated if they do not have the opportunity to respond as fully as they might wish (Opie, 2004). Also, from the researcher's point of view, responses to closed questions are much simpler and quicker to analyse (Blaxter, 1996). Open questions allow respondents more freedom to respond in their own language; enabling opinions, feelings and judgements to be shared (Opie, 2004; Wellington, 2000). Taking this into account, the qualitative data that can be generated through open questions was deemed to be appropriate in meeting the objectives of this research.

Communication to all staff at X Primary School that questionnaires would be distributed the following day was via school email ensured receipt by the whole population. All were provided with a brief explanation of the reasons for the questionnaire and the methods for completion and return. Confidentiality was confirmed and what the data was to be used for and who it would be accessible to

was also explained. It was reiterated that any questions or queries relating to completion of the questionnaire were welcome. A reminder in the form of a thank you via email to all participants also acted as a gentle prompt to those who had not yet completed the questionnaire. Wellington (2000) states that instructions and assurances can maximise the response rate and did enable a response rate of approximately 50% in this research.

## **Interviews**

A series of interviews were undertaken as part of this research with both professional staff and parents. Two members of staff from X Primary School were selected together with the Workforce Development Manager at X Children's Services who has responsibility for implementing restorative practice across all Children's Services. In addition, the leader responsible for implementing and managing restorative practice at X High School also participated in an interview. This method addressed the research objectives of analysing restorative practice models and strategies, identifying barriers to implementation, exploring the impact on pupils, staff and wider school environment and evaluating the effectiveness in improving behaviour and conflict resolution.

The two staff at X Primary School were chosen to participate as they are the only members of staff to have previously undertaken restorative practice training. Contact was made with the Workforce Development Manager following identification as the author of a key document explaining the role of restorative practice across all agencies connected with X Children's Services. Through a colleague, the interviewee from X High School was identified as the restorative practice 'guru' within the school and subsequent contact was made. As Wellington (2000) states, key informants in each organisation were identified particularly relating to specific subject knowledge and each were willing to share the information they had. The YJB (2004) also conducted interviews with 'key stakeholders'.

As well as these interviews with professional staff working with restorative practice, a parent of a pupil from X Primary School was also interviewed. The class teacher had mentioned that this pupil had been involved in a previous restorative circle and that the parent may be willing to speak about it.

Where face to face contact was not possible, initial contact was made via email. In each case, the interviewer's position and purpose of the research was clearly explained, detailing the motives for the research together with an explanation of how the final report was to be used (Wellington, 2000). An invitation to seek clarification where needed was also offered as well as assurances of anonymity and confidentiality.

Interviews were selected as a means of providing respondents with the opportunity to fully explain and explore their motives and provide reasons for responding as they do. When used alongside other methods, an interview is able to gather data, test or develop a hypothesis as well as collecting respondent's opinions (Cohen, 2000). In this research, interviews were used as a means of gathering both data and opinions. Whilst interviews can be difficult to arrange as well as being time consuming, both in implementation and analysis, the data that can be collected can often be 'rich' (Edwards, 1994). Unlike questionnaires, interviews enable the researcher to "probe and explore meanings and interpretations held by participants" (Edwards, 1994, p.101), "reaching the parts which other methods cannot reach" (Wellington, 2000, p.71). As the language used and concern shown by participants can be heard, together with shared views and prejudices; meanings and knowledge can be interpreted through interpersonal social relations (Cohen, 2000; Wellington, 2000). As Scott (2006) explained, the purpose of interviews is to obtain "in-depth understandings" about the experiences of others (p.134). This was the case in this research as all the interviews conducted were valuable sources of information and added a high level of insight into restorative practice.

A schedule of questions for each interview was planned which is essential in ensuring that initial research ideas are translated into meaningful questions for each individual interviewee (Opie, 2004; Wellington, 2000). This process involves ensuring careful consideration is given to the language used so that technical language is avoided as well as ensuring questions are not leading to a particular point of view. Overall, the questions should make sense so that the interviewee is clear what is being asked (Wellington, 2000). It is also important that the structure and order of the questions being asked allows the interview to flow coherently without repetition or omission (Opie, 2004). Prior to interview, all questions were piloted with a colleague who had prior knowledge of the area of research.

Opie (2004) discusses an interview being organised as structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Where a structured interview provides a formal, fixed framework, with the interviewer mostly being in control, the control in an unstructured interview is evenly distributed between both interviewer and interviewee. This level of flexibility and loss of control can lead to unexpected findings which may be more difficult to analyse. A semi-structured interview allows flexibility in both questioning and responses with some control being maintained by the interviewer. A semi-structured framework was followed for this research in all interviews undertaken.

Whilst undertaking the interviews, the method for recording responses had to be carefully considered. Responses from all interviews were collected through note-taking which has been questioned in relation to the accuracy of the data collected (Opie, 2004; Wellington, 2000). Blaxter (1996) states that the process of note taking can be complex. Whilst concentrating on asking the question and then listening how the interviewee is responding, recording an accurate verbatim record can be difficult. This problem was addressed by interview notes being transcribed and typed immediately following each interview to minimise any loss of data from memory. Cohen (2000) however does warn that “there is potential for massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity” (p.281). Being mindful that an interview and subsequent transcription is not merely concerned with data collection, but is also a record of a social encounter; helped to retain the focus and purpose of the interview in this research.

On completion of all interviews, participants were thanked for their valuable contribution towards the research and future contact details were passed on (Opie, 2004).

### **Observations**

Observations provide the “opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from ‘live’ situations” (Cohen, 2000, p.305). The researcher is able to witness events that would be unavailable through other research methods such as verbal interaction, non verbal interactions and professional skills, for example, questioning and explaining (Opie, 2000). Through questionnaires or interviews, participants may not share all that has occurred; either wishing to hide events or by not recognising their importance in the research. Observation is able to highlight specific information that would be difficult

to learn in other circumstances (Scott and Morrison, 2005). When used alongside other research methods, observation is able to provide another context which allows a greater depth of analysis across the research. The evaluation of restorative justice in schools carried out by YJB (2004) also included the use of observations, along with other methods. The observations primarily provided the opportunity to analyse the restorative strategies of circles and conferences but were also been a source of identifying, exploring and evaluating other restorative practice issues. Barriers to implementation and the impact on all parties were also highlighted.

Observations were undertaken of two restorative circles involving children as well as two restorative conferences involving a child and guardian. Observations were not initially planned or included in the initial Learning Contract, however, a colleague at X Primary School, knowing about the research, invited the researcher to observe circles and conferences as they occurred. These observations were not specifically planned and as such specific observation criteria had not been prepared in advance.

Two restorative conferences were observed; the first conference as an observer only but sat in the circle; the second included as a participant. Cohen (2000) states that, "both complete participation and complete detachment are as limiting as each other" (p.311). Whilst non-participation can reduce any "reactivity" of the researchers presence, an observer has to accept what is occurring without asking for explanation of given responses (Opie, 2004) .By observing as both an observer and a participant, the researcher was able to maximise the advantages of both perspectives whilst being aware of the disadvantages.

It is important to note that involvement in both conferences was due to the researcher having built a relationship with the guardian through another role in school and being invited to be included. There was no direct role in either incident that prompted the conferences; involvement was merely through a professional association with the guardian and child. The researcher did not lead either conference which were both led by the member of staff who had taken part in restorative practice training and followed a script of questions.

The main difficulty experienced was recording the events of each observation. It was not appropriate to make notes during each conference; to sit and make write while participants were sharing feelings. As such, recording occurred after the event



(Blaxter, 1996), but this did lead to some difficulty in recording exactly what was said, by who and how. Whilst these observations could be deemed as unstructured, this does not mean that data was collected without aims or objectives in place. The flexible approach allows focus to be altered as necessary ensuring that the information gathered is of most use to the researcher (Opie, 2004). It is worth noting that whilst a less structured approach may be simpler to prepare, the data collected does take longer to analyse than that collected in a structured observation (Cohen, 2004). As invitation to observe circles and conferences was issued with little prior notice, a less structured approach was necessary in the circumstances. Scott and Morrison (2005) state that an observer's own values and judgements may affect what is recorded, and that an observer may only see what they want or expect. By having a clear understanding of the research objectives and recording only what is seen and heard as opposed to what the researcher believes to be implied, Talbot (1999) states that observation can be a reliable research method.

### **Examination of Documentation**

For this research, the definition of a document is an "impression left on a physical object by a human being" (Bell, 2010, p.125). Scott and Morrison (2005) highlight four reasons for the use of documentary evidence: directing initial research direction and design, to assist in development of key concepts and research, "to provide data in own right as an alternative to primary data sources" (p.76), to use in conjunction with other methods to assist in evaluation and analysis. In this research, documentation has identified principles of restorative practice, explored the impact on pupils, staff and wider school environment as well as providing an insight into the use of restorative practice in improving behaviour and conflict resolution.

There is limited literature on the methodological use of documentation, particularly in educational research (Wellington, 2000) and the method has been primarily used in the field of historical research (Scott and Morrison, 2005). Documentation can be used as valuable evidence particularly in constructing a social version of reality (Blaxter, 1996) and this is the reason for using examination of documentation as a supplementary method in this research.

The initial plan highlighted in Learning Contract was to review implementation plans of X Children's Services, X Primary School and X High School. Examination of action

plans formed an important aspect of Howard's (2009) review of restorative practice in schools. When contact was made with X Children's Services and X High School and interviews were conducted, it was discovered that neither had specific implementation plan documentation. However, alternative documentation was made available that enabled examination of documentation relevant to the implementation of restorative practice in both organisations. X Primary School had no implementation plan and as such, no documentation was available.

X High School provided a copy of a powerpoint presentation that had been used as part of staff training. Also provided were two DVDs from schools in another local authority who have successfully implemented restorative practice. X Children's Services also provided a powerpoint presentation that was being used to promote restorative practice to university students. A DVD from school described as 'flagship school' for promoting restorative practice across X Children's Services was also examined. Being able to examine DVD evidence has proved particularly useful as access to the subjects of research was difficult due to geographical restrictions (Bell, 2010). It did, however, highlight the issue of not being able to ask for clarification or expansion of details.

All the documentation examined had been produced by each organisation to promote the positive effects of restorative practice in schools and as such did not contain a discussion of any possible difficulties or barriers

Bell (2010) states that documentation can be identified as either a deliberate or inadvertent source. Where a deliberate source was produced for the attention of future researchers, an inadvertent source is used by researchers for a "purpose other than that for which they were originally intended" (p.129). All documentation examined during this research could be identified as an inadvertent source as they were all produced to promote the benefits of restorative practice in each organisation. The documentation is also categorised as secondary data as it has been collected by someone else, other than the researcher (Blaxter, 1996), and is also an interpretation of an event that occurred prior to the research period (Bell, 2010).

The difficulty of sampling documentation needs to be highlighted and has been identified by Platt (in Cohen, 2000). Blaxter (1996) warns that "documents cannot be

taken at face value” (p.187) and as potentially biased accounts, they need to be carefully and critically assessed in order to be counted as a valuable research tool. The criteria for assessing the quality of documents has been discussed by Bell (2010), Platt in Cohen (2000), Scott and Morrison (2005) and Wellington (2000). The authenticity of a document needs to be assessed to ensure it is genuine and authentic as well as considering whether it is credible and free from distortion. It is also important that the researcher deliberates whether the evidence is clear and comprehensible, which is essential in ensuring whether interpretation and analysis can be considered accurate. The availability of the document should also be considered; questioning who produced it and the purpose for its production. This should lead to an evaluation of the author of the documentation and their position (Blaxter, 1996). Analytical enquiry should be made of the context, the relationship of the author to the recorded events together with the accuracy of what the author has included or omitted (Travers in Cohen, 2000). It cannot be assumed that all “documents are neutral artefacts” (Blaxter, 1996, p.186). Even though examination of the documentation was directed by the research objectives, the challenge remained in extracting the necessary information.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The data collected from this research has been organised into the four methods used; questionnaires, interviews, observations and examination of documentation. A discussion of the results from each method will include a brief analysis of the evidence collected. A more thorough analysis of how each method meets the research objectives will be included in analysis of findings section.

### **Questionnaires**

#### Initial Questionnaire

When questioned how participating in a circle had made staff feel, the majority replied with negative comments such as anxious, nervous, bored, uncomfortable, embarrassed and even sick. These remarks mostly relate to the experience of speaking in front of a large group. There were seven positive comments which

included feeling relaxed, included, amused, being happy to join in and good that everyone had opportunity to speak.

Whilst two thirds responded that they felt the circle activity was beneficial, fifteen out of the twenty one who responded stated that they felt there were negative aspects to the experience. The benefits highlighted included breaking the ice, putting people at ease, an opportunity to find out how colleagues are feeling and also to hear others ideas and news. The negative aspects of the activity included raising stress levels, feeling uncomfortable about speaking and thinking about what to say. Some also stated that they didn't like being made to talk. Despite these comments, the majority of respondents acknowledged the activity had purpose.

### Second Questionnaire

The second questionnaire was completed by X Primary School staff a year later to determine the changes in levels of knowledge of restorative practices and how these are applied. When questioned if each member of staff was familiar with the term 'restorative practice' in school, there was an even split between those who had come across the expression and those who had not. Discussing further the use of restorative circles or conversations, eleven confirmed they had never previously been involved, one did not know and seven confirmed they had applied restorative practices.

Staff were questioned how they would normally deal with conflict and negative behaviour, and responses were then categorised into whether the response would be determined as having a restorative approach or not. Strategies that did not follow the restorative approach included telling a child what they should be doing instead of the negative behaviour, asking for an apology, ignoring behaviour, explaining behaviour as wrong and unacceptable and also involving senior management. Although only three members of staff referred to restorative practice specifically in their responses, such as using circles and restorative questions, other answers were deemed as having a restorative approach, whether recognised by staff or not. Discussion played a part in the responses given including talking directly to those involved, getting children to talk together to resolve any difficulty, acting in a fair manner, listening to all sides and acting as an intermediary. One respondent

mentioned about encouraging children to take responsibility for their own actions and another referred to being aware of their own language when dealing with conflict.

Finally, staff were asked what they had found to be the most effective way to deal with conflict and negative behaviour. Four members of staff responded that the most effective way they had determined was to involve staff with higher levels of training or senior management, whilst another four staff stated it depended on the child as to the best way to deal with a difficult situation. The remaining responses could all be categorised as following a restorative approach, although only one member of staff referred specifically to applying restorative practice principles. These responses included remaining impartial, keeping calm, identifying triggers for behaviour, instilling the idea of shared responsibility and the use of discussion, particularly allowing everyone to have a say and encouraging children to admit they had done something wrong.

The first questionnaire was useful in identifying how participants feel being involved in a circle. Whilst the circle was only used as a check-in activity, it was helpful in identifying the range of feelings experienced during the circle. This could be valuable when considering how young people feel being involved in circles. The second questionnaire identified how elements of restorative practice are being applied by staff in managing behaviour and conflict, either knowingly or inadvertently.

## **Interviews**

### Interview with X Children's Services

The Workforce Development Team are working to implement restorative practice across all services and are the only team within the service who start each working day with a circle, where they have been able to identify hidden talents, build confidence and increase motivation. Whilst there is not a specific implementation plan in place, the intention is to promote restorative practice through a flagship school within the city and to create an embedded practice. It is felt that schools need to showcase restorative practice success to others; highlighting the positives such as creating a sense of community. Training opportunities, courses offered through the International Institute of Restorative Practice (IIRP), twilight sessions and inset days are available across the city but it is very much up to each school to decide how to

engage or whether to engage at all. It was confirmed that they were getting requests from people everyday about training. When discussing measuring success, it was confirmed that reduced exclusions and improved attainment in schools have been achieved following the use of restorative practice but that measuring the successes and benefits of restorative practice was complex. It is difficult to isolate the effects of restorative practice without being affected by other factors. When discussing targets, it was stated that working to a specific target may cause “the foot to be taken off the gas when the target is met.” The approach being used by the Workforce Development team was referred to as “flipping the brief.” Rather than approaching a problem by looking how it can be stopped or corrected, they are looking at how they can create opportunities initially to support better outcomes.

When discussing specific restorative practice methods, it was confirmed that it is very much a “best fit” scenario; schools using what works for them. In one school, lunchtime staff had been briefed in restorative practice and were holding circles in the playground to deal with conflict. It was recognised that children were beginning to regulate their own behaviour rather than miss valuable playtime taking part in a circle. It was stated that methods such as circles are much easier to implement in primary schools, as the environment is much more nurture based and there is an existing circle time model in use. Primary schools are also much closer to parents and the wider community than high schools and support and structure was identified as being the key to success.

It was highlighted that it is much more complex than just introducing a new range of skills but is about a change in the ways of working so that restorative practice becomes the normal, natural way to interact. X Children’s Services are aware of coming and leading training in schools and then leaving and eventually everything then reverting to how it was previously. A cultural change would be required and people needed to be prepared for that.

#### Interview with X High School

X High School had been using restorative approaches in some aspect for approximately three years but only around a quarter of staff have received some formal restorative practice training. The school would like to have more staff trained but have been unable to organise this through the local authority as yet. The

strategies of restorative practice in place are based around the use of language and the conversations held between pupils and adults in school; focusing on building positive relationships and developing understanding. Restorative circles and conferences are also used between pupils, staff and parents where necessary. Staff only circles do not take place, although the restorative practice leader spoken to said, "I would love to use them."

When questioned about the impact restorative practice has had on the school, it was confirmed that all parties are more open to talking about difficulties; "staff are more open to listening and pupils much more open to discussion." Whilst it was stated that there is now more dialogue occurring across the school, the leader did confirm that it was not totally embedded. It was admitted that some staff do struggle with circles; "it is a teacher's default position to stand at the front of the classroom", and some staff do get restorative practice and sanctions the wrong way around; punish then talk after. It was acknowledged that some staff see restorative practice as a "soft option" and questioned whether some level of sanction needed to remain to please some staff and parents. As such, the school's behaviour policy was currently being reviewed to give pupils the opportunity to have a voice in an appropriate setting. It is hoped that restorative practice can improve relationships not just within the school but also across the whole community but the leader does acknowledge that a cultural shift is required in how relationships are managed in order for restorative practice to fulfil its potential.

Whilst the leader responsible for restorative practice is enthusiastic and knowledgeable, much more is needed to enable restorative practice to have a significant impact across the whole school community. There are clearly pockets of good practice and understanding of the key principles but also gaps in comprehension amongst some staff.

#### Interview with a parent from X Primary School

The parent, whose child had suffered harm, was open and honest throughout the discussion and briefly recalled the situation prior to a restorative circle being used. The class teacher had informed her prior to the circle that all the children involved would sit down together and she had no concerns about this. The difficulties had been resolved since the restorative circle and the parent believes that her child is

now able to speak up if anything similar occurs again rather than keeping it quiet as before. Whilst she feels it was a good experience that has given her child confidence to explain things clearly, she states that she did not get much feedback from school following the circle. As the matter was resolved, she has not pursued this but stated that she would have done had the resolution not been a positive one. It is evident that the experience has been a positive one for both the child and the parent. However, it was not possible to ascertain whether the other party had been satisfied with the experience and outcome.

#### Interview with Staff from X Primary School

Both staff indicated that they had experienced successes implementing restorative practice in certain situations; bullying had ceased, an individual's confidence had increased and a pupil who regularly struggles with social and emotional behaviour difficulties had engaged and accepted responsibility. Children having an opportunity to speak, particularly in circles, had been effective in enabling pupils to engage and accept responsibility. It was stated that whilst the adult is there only to facilitate, the pupils are more able to connect and take ownership and not feel threatened by the adult's presence. Whilst there had been successes, it was reiterated that there are sometimes difficulties and times when restorative practice had not been effective. "Some pupils simply won't participate or take responsibility", whereas there are some that are unable articulate. It was confirmed that pupils with cognitive or social difficulties have struggled with empathy and understanding the emotions of others. Both members of staff agreed that whilst it might not work for all parties, it is valuable for others to be heard, even if a resolution is not reached. The training that both had undertaken was valued, particularly the use of role plays and scenarios. Both still had a restorative question card with them and admitted to referring to it regularly; it being described as "unbelievably useful". The use of question cards across all staff in school, not just teachers, was deemed to be essential in training staff to be more effective in the use of restorative practices.



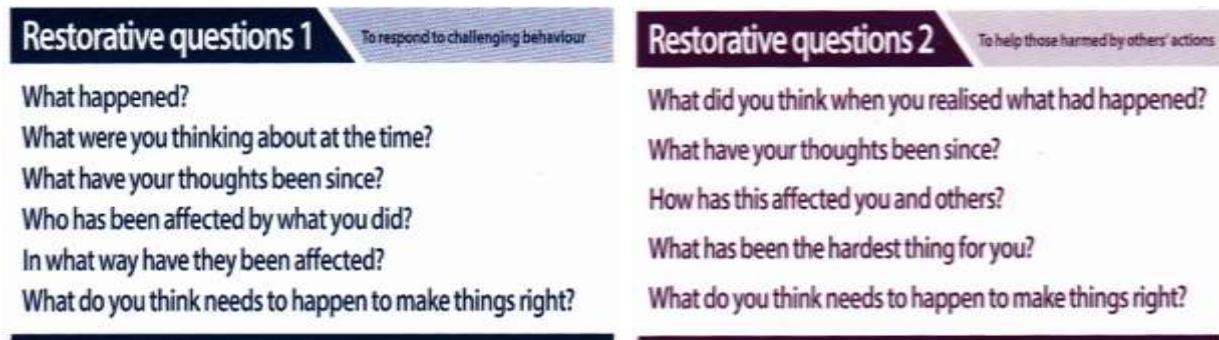


Figure 2 – Restorative Question cards

Both staff demonstrated a good understanding of restorative practice and how its use is beneficial in different scenarios. An awareness of the limitations of restorative practice was clearly highlighted but it was still considered to be a highly effective tool in school. A method for training other staff was suggested which was clearly linked to existing positive practice.

It was noted that more thorough responses were obtained through interviews with participants who were not professionally familiar with the interviewer. Familiarity caused less detail in responses and more assumption of interviewer background knowledge.

## Observations

### Restorative Circles

The first circle included the class teacher and five pupils as well as the facilitator. The facilitator remained impartial throughout the procedure and did not side with the other teacher. The rules of turn taking were clearly explained at the beginning but had to be repeated later when two children interrupted whilst another was speaking. The facilitator did not lead the discussion or offer any opinion and merely repeated what each child had said to ensure understanding. Each participant, including the teacher, was asked, “who has been hurt and what do you want to come out of today?” and to those who had caused harm, “how are you going to change things and repair the damage?”

The second restorative circle that was observed included just three pupils and the facilitator. Again, following the script, each pupil was asked the same questions and

given opportunity to speak whilst the others listened. It quickly became clear that there was not an agreement as to what had occurred, with different versions being shared. Questions were repeated but still different stories were shared. It was not clear what hurt had been caused and who was responsible. No conclusion was reached; the circle ended and the pupils returned to class.

The observation of the circles provided the opportunity to witness the role of an effective facilitator as well as how children respond to the scripted questions. Whilst a positive conclusion was reached in one circle and not in the other, the opportunity to speak and be heard was beneficial during both circles. The interaction of a pupil during one observation was affected by the presence of the observer as he repeatedly turned to look at the observer and was not paying full attention to the circle.

### Restorative Conferences

Both restorative conferences were facilitated by the same member of staff again and included the same group of people; a pupil, a carer, the facilitator (who was also the class teacher) and the observer. Both conferences occurred following incidents at home and were instigated by the carer who was very upset by the child's behaviour. During both conferences, after the carer had been asked to share their version of events, the pupil was then invited to speak. The carer did interrupt the pupil on both occasions. The pupil, who does have some problems with social understanding, showed little emotion in both conferences and the facilitator did have to point out how upset his carer was. Explanation needed to be given to the pupil that someone can be hurt on the inside and that it was possible to be hurt without being hit. The pupil did say sorry but the level of understanding and empathy was unclear to determine. At the conclusion of both conferences, the carer expressed thanks for being able to talk about the situation.

The effect of emotion during a restorative conference was valuable to witness during the observation and could not have been captured in another way. The emotive experience of talking about hurt and harm is valuable during the process of a restorative conference and forms an essential part of restorative practice principles. Although it is a challenging experience requiring the skills of a facilitator who fully understands how restorative practice works.

## Examination of Documentation

### Powerpoint Presentations

Both powerpoint presentations provided by X Children's Services and X High School were produced to promote the use of restorative practice as well as being a tool to provide background information such as definitions, key principles, theories and methodology. Both documents also included a detailed explanation of the social discipline window. The X High School powerpoint was shared with school staff only and as such, the audience was provided with the restorative questions to be used in different situations. Along with this information, role play scenarios and scripts were distributed and discussed in which staff had the opportunity to practically apply the questions. The audience of X Children's Services powerpoint presentation also had little prior knowledge of restorative practice and this was reflected in the depth of information provided. The contrast between the traditional approach and a restorative approach was highlighted, including specific examples of how each works in different scenarios. The use of restorative language and restorative questions was detailed together with explanations of the effectiveness of these methods.

Both sets of powerpoint presentation paperwork provided a significant amount of background knowledge of restorative practice together with helpful insights how it can be effectively applied. However, neither document explored the possible difficulties in implementing restorative practice. If the researcher had attended both presentations as they were given, more information from the questions raised and consequent discussion would have been obtained.

### DVDs

The DVDs examined, from the three different schools, all included contributions from staff, parents and pupils. Each discussed the different benefits of applying restorative practice to individual pupils and their relationships, to whole classes and the entire school environment; respect, calmer environment, reduced conflict, increased confidence. One DVD stressed the need to involve all children in restorative practice "otherwise it is like playing a game where only one person has rules." It was stated that the initial reaction to restorative practice was not always positive with some believing the particular school had enough work to do. "Restorative practice isn't

described as the easy option but a good way to challenge and support without being confrontational.” All three DVDs agreed that schools have an important role to play in establishing community but that commitment from all staff to restorative practice is essential. It was highlighted that the explicit language and methods available through restorative practice allow a philosophy to develop as opposed to a working structure and this is what makes the practice successful.

It is important to recognise that the purpose of all the DVDs is to promote the use of restorative practice in schools and highlight the positive effects of engaging with this practice. They have all been produced after successful implementation and as such do not bring to light the experience at the beginning of the process or during its instigation. This omission affects the breadth of evidence provided by this source.

## **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Principles of Restorative Practice**

Whilst X Children’s Services have stated their goal as “striving to achieve a more comprehensive implementation across the city” (Ambrose, 2012), it is evident that this is a complex target and one which will not be achieved in a short period of time. At X Primary School there was an even split between those who had come across the term restorative practice and those who had never heard of it. Also, during interview, X Children Services did confirm it was each individual school’s decision to decide how to engage with restorative practice training or whether to engage at all. This view appears to be in contrast with the goal of achieving “a more comprehensive implementation” but does follow the restorative principle of not doing *to* or *for* but doing *with* (Watchel, O’Connel, Watchell, 2010). Engaging others with restorative principles may continue to be a challenge if a consistent approach is not determined. Whilst there is a ‘flagship school’ where the principles of restorative practice can be evidenced, the numbers of people who are actually able to observe this practice in situ is limited.

The strategies of restorative practice in place at X High School are based around the use of language and the conversations held between pupils and adults in school, thus the school is focusing on building positive relationships and developing

understanding. This follows the approach identified by Hull (2012) of building relationships through developing respect, honesty and responsibility. There was some evidence of appropriate language being used at X Primary School although some staff were not aware that it could be considered as a restorative approach. The correct use of language could be classed as a forerunner to a fully embedded restorative practice, as the explicit language that supports positive relationships was highlighted in the DVDs demonstrating successful restorative practice in schools.

Whilst many have discussed the specific term 'restorative practice' as being more applicable in schools (McClusky, 2008; Morrison, 2006; Vaandering, 2010), it has become apparent, following this research, that some principles of restorative practice are being applied in schools without a specific name being given to that practice. This approach, or use of skills, may enable an embedded practice to develop rather than focusing on restorative practice as a whole. Building on existing good practice, rather than thinking the whole approach to behaviour management needs changing, may be much more effective in ensuring the principles of restorative practice are shared and embedded.

The use of powerpoints and DVDs were valuable tools in providing background information to restorative practice and defining key principles, theories and methodology. Whilst specific examples of how a restorative approach can be effective in different scenarios were shared, it is important to highlight that only the positive aspects of restorative practice were communicated. In order to enable a considered decision, an individual needs to be aware of all aspects involved in the introduction of restorative practice into schools; the advantages and the difficulties.

Also, it could be argued whether the use of powerpoint is the most effective method of sharing or transmitting information regarding restorative practice. The teachers interviewed at X Primary School stated that training involving the use of scenarios and role plays was highly valued. This method enabled understanding to be internalised, allowing higher level understanding as opposed to surface learning.

### **Restorative Practice Models and Strategies**

Both DCSF (2008) and Hopkins (2007) identified that most schools already teach some aspect of personal and social development through SEAL, often using circle

time. X Children's Services also confirmed that through using the existing circle time model, that restorative circles are much easier to implement in primary schools. It could be questioned whether these restorative practice strategies could be more fully embedded if the focus for implementation was through primary schools rather than high schools. If children become familiar with these strategies for dealing with conflict, they may be much more inclined to continue engaging with these practices as they move into high school.

Circles can also be used as a tool for staff to build and maintain positive relationships (Hull, 2012; Macready, 2009). X Children's Services stated that they are used within the Workforce Development Team and have been a tool to identify hidden talents, build confidence and increase motivation. Also, X High School has highlighted that whilst they do not use staff only circles yet; they see the benefit and would like them to be in place. The experience at X Primary School was somewhat different. When participating in a staff only circle, there were many different perceptions regarding participation, the purpose and the benefit of the circle. Whilst two thirds stated that they felt the circle activity was beneficial, three quarters of the participants also felt that there were also negative aspects to the experience. These included the raising of stress levels, feeling it was merely a tool for venting frustrations and individuals feeling uncomfortable about speaking to a group. What was also evident following the staff questionnaires was the range of emotions experienced by staff at X Primary School during the circle experience. Vaandering (2010) warns that the maintaining the delicate balance of nurturing the self-worth of the individual is essential in the process of restorative practice and this research has identified the challenge in maintaining the correct balance for all participants.

As highlighted in the literature review, Wood, Bruner and Ross (in Macready, 2009) state that the role of another who 'scaffolds' or provides support to an individual is vital in ensuring sustainable progression can be made. Staff at X Primary School and X High School both referred to using the restorative question card as a tool for asking the correct questions, enabling the correct level of scaffolding to support the individual to come to a realisation themselves. Also, the script of questions used during the restorative conferences observed at X Primary School allowed the facilitator to remain impartial and allowed the individuals to recognise themselves

what was needed to move forward. This precise level of scaffolding also provides the foundation for any change to be sustainable.

As previously stated, obtaining the correct balance of support can be difficult to achieve (Vaandering, 2010) and examples of this were also witnessed during the restorative circles and conferences observed at X Primary School. When accepting responsibility for hurt was not evident and lack of understanding was demonstrated, the facilitator, even relying on the script of questions, was unable to aid a resolution. There is a danger that in striving to facilitate a resolution to the immediate situation, that the individuals concerned are moved away from working *with* and are moved back to having something done *to* or *for* them (Watchel, O'Connell, Watchell, 2010). This will then affect their future interactions and relationships.

Hopkins (2007) confirmed that a conference is directed by an impartial party who facilitates the proceedings, ensuring preparation, sensitivity, flexibility and neutrality. In all cases observed, the facilitator did not offer any personal opinion and ensured all parties understood by repeating what each individual had said.

### **Barriers to Implementation of Restorative Practice**

Hull (2012) discusses the need for a commitment to continuity of practice in ensuring restorative practice has a positive effect in the lives of young people; this was also reiterated in the DVD evidence. Both X Children's Services and X High School highlight the need for a cultural shift being needed in order for restorative practice to positively impact the lives of those involved. This cultural change involves more than just introducing new skills but is about changing the way individuals think. This highlights the complex nature of restorative practice becoming truly embedded as X Children's Services refer to it as a "best fit" scenario, in that individual schools use restorative practice in a way which best suits them. The need for a continuity of practice then becomes complex as each setting applies restorative practice to meet their own needs. Indeed, Hopkins (2007) highlights that when schools do not have the same agenda when introducing restorative practice, this lack of uniformity can affect the success of implementation and continuity.

Within individual schools, levels of knowledge of restorative practice are varied. There is a variance of knowledge between staff at X Primary School and also X High

School confirmed there are not as many staff who have been able to attend the restorative practice training as they had hoped due to lack of availability from X Children's Services. This must also affect the continuity of practice within individual schools. Another aspect concerning continuity involves the pupils. It was stated in the DVD evidence that all children in each setting need to be involved in restorative practice "otherwise it is like playing a game where only one person has the rules". Restorative practice will never be successful if the children involved do not understand what it is, how it works, what the teacher's role is and what their own role is. A teacher at X Primary School also confirmed that children should be involved in all aspects of restorative practice in order for them to fully engage with the practice and take responsibility for their own actions.

Vaandering (2010) warns that pupils must be affected in some way by the institutional and structural factors in place in schools. This was evident at X High School when it was confirmed that some staff do prefer to stand at the front of the room and talk to the pupils rather than considering using a less confrontational circle to communicate. This confirms McClusky's (2008) concern that the relationship between a traditional retributive approach and a restorative approach is not straightforward. A change in approach is difficult to initiate across each individual setting, with many factors affecting an embedded change. Some staff and parents at X High School and X Primary School still indicated a need for some level of sanction to remain in place. It would have been helpful if this type of detail could have been obtained from the DVDs where restorative practice is deemed to have been successful.

It was noted at X Primary School, that a pupil with social understanding difficulties, showed little emotion in both conferences and needed considerable support from the facilitator to engage with those who were hurt. Watchel (in Vaandering, 2010) discusses the need for the correct setting of control and support for the individual to be successful. A teacher at X Primary also confirmed that some pupils do not engage with the process or take responsibility. It is clear from this research that different pupils each required varying levels of control and support, provided by the facilitator. The challenge for the facilitator is knowing what levels of support are necessary and whether the facilitator needs prior knowledge and understanding of the individuals involved in restorative practice in order to successfully support. This is



difficult to ascertain as in each of the cases observed, the facilitator was the class teacher or had previously taught the children and as such was familiar with the individual needs.

Howard (2009) states that “detailed action planning” (p.9) is recommended for ensuring sustained practice yet none of the schools or local authority had specific implementation plans in place. It is however, the intention of X Children’s Services to promote restorative practice through a flagship school within the city. It was confirmed that there was a belief that working to a specific target may cause “the foot to be taken off the gas when the target is met”. It must also be considered that by not having a specific plan of action or a confirmed aim, that those involved do not have a shared purpose or direction to follow. This may cause an initial enthusiasm that could dwindle quickly without specific support being in place.

### **The Impact of Restorative Practice on Pupils, Staff and Wider School Environment**

Whilst discussing restorative circles, Hopkins (2007) states that all parties have the opportunity to be heard and through discussion, relationships can be repaired. During observations at X Primary School the facilitator asked each participant what they wanted the outcome of the circle to be. By asking everyone involved how they are going to act to change and help repair the damage, the individuals are empowered through the facilitator allowing them to take control of the situation (Macready, 2009). It was witnessed that circles and conferences can provide a suitable, safe climate for developing social understanding of others (Morrison, 2006). This was particularly evident when the carer at X Primary School, who was visibly upset, still felt safe in sharing her feelings and emotions. Children, who had been hurt, also felt safe enough to express what had happened and how they felt, in front of those who had hurt them. When the facilitator at X Primary School did not offer her own opinions or solutions and merely repeated what had been said by others, this allowed those participating in the circle to feel safe to share without judgements being offered. A positive aspect of restorative conferences was demonstrated when a carer expressed thanks for being able to talk about the situation.

Following the introduction of restorative practice at X High School, it was confirmed that staff are more open to listening and in turn, pupils were becoming more open to

discussion. This willingness to communicate and talk about problems is hoped to play a part in improving relationships not just within school but also throughout the community. This desire is demonstrated by many others who are also acknowledging the positive effects of restorative practice by adopting its principles across schools (Hopkins, 2007; Howard, 2009; Hull, 2012; Macready, 2009, Youth Justice Board, 2004). The parent from X Primary School also stated that she believed her child's experience of restorative practice would now enable her child to confidently speak up if anything similar happened again. It was identified that restorative practice, applied in whatever method, gives pupils the opportunity to have voice in an appropriate setting.

As well as increasing confidence, it was reported in the DVDs that greater respect for others had been demonstrated together with the feeling of a much calmer environment. Whilst these specific benefits were not highlighted through the other research methods, it could be as a result of restorative practice not being fully embedded in other settings and giving time for a philosophy to develop rather than the initial change in practice from retributive to restorative.

X Primary School had confirmed that some pupils had not engaged in the restorative approach and some had refused to accept any responsibility for the harm they had caused. In these circumstances, it was felt that using restorative circles and conferences were still valuable to all those participating. The act of being able to explain what has happened and how that incident has impacted on each individual had provided beneficial even when a resolution had not been reached. It was stated that it is important for the children to understand how the process works and that everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard.

### **The Effectiveness of Restorative Practice in Improving Behaviour and Conflict Resolution**

It is evident that the effectiveness of restorative practice is dependent on each setting's motive or aim in introducing the practice. The approach being used by the Workforce Development team was referred to as "flipping the brief." Rather than approaching the problem of negative behaviour and conflict by looking at how it can be stopped or corrected, they are looking at how they can create opportunities initially to support better outcomes for the pupils involved.

Reductions in exclusions and suspensions through the use of restorative practice reported by Brown (2001), Howard (2009) and Vaandering (2010) were also reported during interview with X Children's Services. X High School and X Primary School did not report any reductions but the success of restorative practice in each setting was not being measured by quantitative data. Unless a school setting are measuring the number of exclusions against restorative practice strategies, it is difficult to determine whether any reduction is as a direct result of these strategies or not. Other factors cannot be dismissed as having an effect behaviour and conflict resolution.

Vaandering (2010) raises the issue of the potential misuse of power in school relationships and an element of this was highlighted at X High School. It was identified that some staff will first issue a sanction to a pupil and then initiate a discussion after the punishment has been issued. For some staff, this traditional method of dealing with negative behaviour is engrained and as McClusky (2008) warns, it is difficult to merely swap from a retributive approach to a restorative one. X Primary School staff when questioned, also had mixed approaches to addressing negative behaviour. Some were talking to pupils but not always allowing them to opportunity to explain in their own words what had happened and how they felt before stepping in and suggesting solutions or demanding apologies. It is apparent that judging behaviour and the individual pupils involved still occurs in many cases. There are also staff who feel it is the correct approach, in some circumstances, to refer the matter to senior management in order for action to be taken. The lack of consistent approach, displayed by staff, can cause confusion for pupils which may lead to a lack of trust from pupils towards staff.

The change from a traditional approach can also be confusing for pupils who may not fully understand or trust the new restorative approach. One pupil, when asked what he could do to repair the hurt that had been caused, explained that he could stay in and miss his playtime, yet he had denied being involved in any wrong doing. The pupil may have been more familiar with accepting a punishment for hurting someone rather than talking, explaining and apologising in order to put things right.

There were many examples, identified through this research, which confirmed the positive effects of restorative practice in improving behaviour and conflict. X Children's Services reported that children in one setting were beginning to regulate

their own behaviour and rather than missing their playtime, they were circling up independently to resolve minor conflict. The parent of a pupil at X Primary School also confirmed that previous longstanding difficulties had been resolved following the application of restorative practices and staff also confirmed that incidents of bullying had been resolved following the use of circles between involved parties. It is also important to highlight that it was reported that there had been occasions when restorative practice had not resolved conflict and no satisfactory conclusion was reached. As previously highlighted, there were identified some positives to still applying restorative practice, even if a resolution could not be reached.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evident that the use of restorative practice in schools can be effective in improving behaviour and is a valuable tool when applied to conflict resolution. Through honest and open communication applied in the correct setting, and supported by those who possess the correct knowledge and skills, relationships can be repaired and restored as responsibility is accepted. This philosophy can be applied as an alternative to a retributive approach to negative behaviour but cannot become an embedded practice without support from senior leaders and knowledge being made available to all parties involved to enable skills to be developed.

The challenge in such a cultural shift is changing attitudes and preconceived ideas and enabling the vision of restorative practice to be captured by all. Opportunities to share the vision must be given and the subsequent challenge is how this is achieved. There are numerous accounts of the positive impact of restorative practice for pupils, staff and the wider school environment; these need to be considered alongside the barriers of implementing restorative practice to enable a sustained, consistent approach to be effective. There is evidence that even in these early days of restorative practice being applied in comparative school settings, the impact on how relationships are conducted for those involved can be positive and long-lasting.

Individual schools do need to agree why they are implementing restorative practice and ensure this focus guides planning. If reduced exclusions and conflict is the target then some form of monitoring needs to be in place; focusing on quantitative data.

This is a possible area for future research. Also, it is possibly too early to assess the long term positive effects restorative practice can have on the lives of individuals and school communities, but this could be addressed through future qualitative research, perhaps with clearer links to theoretical perspectives.

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