

“*Being an adult in a school is a profound moral challenge.*”
(Weissbourd, 2003)

Introduction

As indeed is all work which involves caring for people, teaching is *moral* work. The work of schools and teachers can have profound consequences for the students in their charge, and these consequences extend far beyond the mere academic or intellectual realms. How teachers *work with students* is, perhaps, even more important than *what* they objectively plan to teach them – their influence extends much further than the intended classroom lesson. One of the major influences on students’ emotional, social, psychological and moral development is how the school and its teachers recognise, deal with and work from their fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence as human beings. Increasingly, educators are coming to understand that the lessons learned in school about how we should form and nurture relationships, how we should treat one another and, in particular, how we should deal with conflict and wrongdoing, have life-long consequences for their students (George, 2014). Getting this relational basis right in schools is therefore a moral imperative, especially one may argue in a faith community such as a Catholic school. Restorative practices offers a way of embedding the values and principles of our Catholic faith tradition in the very lived experience of the teachers, students and parents of a school.

Restorative Practices is a coherent, but counter-cultural, philosophy which views conflict and wrongdoing through the lens of our fundamental relatedness with one another. A restorative approach recognises that the central issue with conflict and wrongdoing is that these cause harm to people and relationships, and that there is an obligation on all concerned to attempt to repair this harm. In addition to repairing harm and seeking healing in the wake of wrongdoing, a restorative approach also aims to build and strengthen the relationships that exist within the community in order to help prevent or at least minimise the potential for such wrongdoing in the future. It is an *educative* approach which is in-keeping with our Catholic tradition – in fact, working restoratively enables us to better live out the Gospel message, enables us to express the richness of our scriptural and Catholic sacramental heritage, is congruent with the body of Catholic Social Teaching, and encourages us to live the particular set of values that give flesh to our Catholic tradition.

Restorative Practices

The traditional approach to dealing with conflict/wrongdoing, which was adapted largely from the criminal justice system, is to ask

- “What rule was broken?”
- “Who is responsible?” and
- “What do they deserve?”

This traditional approach can suffer from problems similar to those that afflict the criminal justice system, viz: that the needs of those most affected by the wrongdoing are often ignored, and they can be totally excluded from the process of seeking solutions; that wrongdoers are not held accountable directly to the people they have harmed; that it can lead to an externalisation of the ‘rules’ and a legalistic approach to solving what are essentially problems of relationship; that an undue focus and reliance on punishment and its supposed deterrent effect is ineffective in developing positive behaviours and values, and that it doesn’t effectively prevent recidivism by offenders (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2006). St Augustine, writing in the fifth century, observed that “students often endure the punishments which are designed to compel their learning, rather than submit to the process of learning” (St Augustine, City of God XXI, 14).

In schools, where positive, healthy relationships are valued as central to the teaching-learning process, the traditional approach to behaviour management can foster suspicion and separation between staff and students instead of the supportive relationships being sought. While punitive behaviour management regimes may enforce compliance, primarily through fear, they are unlikely to encourage the development of positive values and self-directed right behaviour, or to nurture positive, affirming relationships between adults and children. A primary reliance on the use of aversive punishment in schools has been shown to alienate students from connection with the very positive role models (the adults in the school) from whom we would hope they would be learning (Sanson, Montgomery, Gault, Gridley & Thomson, 1996). Eminent criminologist John Braithwaite (1989) notes that too rapid an escalation to punishment risks making young people more angry than thoughtful. All school communities would, however,

presumably include encouraging *thoughtfulness* in their students as one of their very primary aims.

The restorative approach starts from a very different set of questions:

- “What happened?”
- “What harm has been done, to whom?” and
- “What can be done to address the harm, and to avoid it in future?”

With these questions driving the process, the restorative approach focuses *first* on recognising the harm that wrongdoing or conflict cause to people and relationships, and the obligation to repair that harm. Restorative approaches enable and encourage wrongdoers to face up to the real consequences of their behaviour by allowing the people affected and harmed by wrongdoing to be heard and to have their say in any possible ‘solution.’

Jesuit Fr Kurt Denk describes four *Guiding Principles of Restorative Justice* which apply equally to restorative practices in schools:

- I. Relationships precede rules – the key issue with wrongdoing is the harm that it causes to people and relationships.
- II. Justice by participation rather than by proxy – that those most affected should be directly involved.
- III. Restoration of wounded communities, not just adjudication of offending individuals – that a restorative approach seeks healing, not just retribution, and
- IV. The restorative justice continuum: from order, to rehabilitation, to shalom.

As Denk explains, where restorative justice differs is in its conviction that communities ideally desire not simply *order*, not even just the *rehabilitation* or *treatment* of its ill members, but a *deeper and more constitutive peace* – that is, a fundamental at-rightness and well-being of relationships that actually feeds relational growth. He describes this as the biblical concept of *shalom*. (Denk, 2008)

A restorative response to wrongdoing is, therefore, one which: brings together all who have a stake in the problem; recognises who has been affected and explores and acknowledges how they have been affected; identifies what needs to happen to repair as much of the harm that has been done as possible; and calls on the people themselves to work out how to put things as right as possible and how to avoid such problems in the future. This type of process is both *relationally-based* and *educative*. It is relationally-based since it *draws on* existing and potential significant relationships and encourages their repair and further growth; it is educative because it *draws out* (fr L. ‘*educare*’) from the people involved their inner resources and encourages learning about ‘the other’ and the effect our behaviour can have on them. It recognises, affirms, and helps build our fundamental interrelatedness.

Restorative practices views every instance of wrong-doing as an *opportunity for learning* - especially for those responsible for the wrong-doing (Wachtel, 1999). It is an educative process which challenges the offender to become aware of, and sensitive to, the harm their actions have caused, to consider the needs of ‘the other,’ and to meet the obligation for reparation that their behaviour has brought. It enables those affected by the wrongdoing to have their story told and affirmed, and offers both offender and victim the opportunity to be involved in working out how to repair some of the harm that has been caused.

The inter-relatedness which is emphasised in the philosophy of restorative practices, can be described in a graph, as shown in *Figure 1*. In this two-dimensional field of practice, on the vertical axis are ‘*Expectations for being human*’ - i.e. expectations that people will be all that they can be, including being accountable for their behaviour and actions. On the horizontal axis is ‘*Support for being human*’ - i.e. the assistance people need to really be *all that they can be* (Vaandering, 2013).

To have relationships in which we expect people to be all that they can be (high on the vertical axis), but not offer support for them doing that (low on the horizontal axis), is to treat people as *objects to manage*. This is reflected in a punitive regime, and involves doing things TO people in order to get them to do what we want.

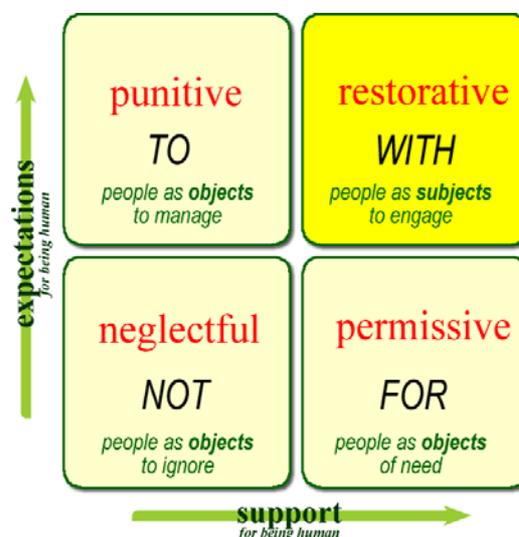


Figure 1 - The Relationship ‘Window’ (Vaandering, 2013)

Relationships in which we don't expect people to be all that they can be, but support them anyway, involve treating them as *objects of need*. We tend to do things FOR these people, often so that we feel good. If we don't expect people to be all that they can be, and don't support them, then we treat them as *objects to ignore* and as people that we do NOT need to care for. In each of these three types of relationships, harm can be done to the person's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. These types of relationships can also perpetuate harm in the wake of wrongdoing by re-victimising those affected by this harm.

To expect that people will be all that they can be, and to support them in striving for that, we are then working WITH people, not as *objects to manage*, *objects to ignore* or *objects of need*, but as *subjects to engage*. This is what restorative practices calls us to do. Working in this top-right quadrant, in which we have high expectations of people and in which we strongly support them to be all that they can be, is really expressing unconditional love. It is effectively saying "no matter what you do or say, I'm still going to support you and hold you accountable to be all that you can be."

Dealing with conflict or wrongdoing in this restorative way is therefore respectful of the inherent dignity of the *person* – both for the *offender* and the *victim* – while not tolerating or accepting the offender's *behaviour*. It is calling the offender to consider how his behaviour has affected others, to make amends for the harm done, and to find ways of reintegrating into their community. Braithwaite (1989) describes this separation of the *person* from the *behaviour* as confronting the behaviour with disapproval, but within a continuum of respect and support. St Augustine, centuries earlier, made this same distinction in his call to "love the sinner, hate the sin" (St Augustine, City of God, XIV, 6). For St Augustine, this was the way in which a wayward brother could be called back to the righteous path - that it would only be with the loving support of his community that he would have the strength to leave behind whichever vice had separated him from his community.

While a punitive approach can encourage offenders to turn inwards and focus on themselves and their own distress, a restorative response encourages an inward examination and realisation, and then an outward movement towards the other in empathy and reparation. This movement inwards in order to transcend the self and reach out to 'the other' is reflective of a Catholic view of justice. The purpose of any restorative process is to have the difficult discussions that need to occur with the aim of repairing the harm done, and encouraging this movement in the offender towards 'the other.' The facilitator's role is simply to enable these discussions to occur.

In practical terms, restorative responses can be placed along a continuum of activity as seen in *Figure 2*. From *affective statements* ("It makes me sad when you do that...") and *affective questions* ("How do you think he feels when you do that?") at the informal end, through to the highly structured and formal community conference at the other. As you go along the continuum, the stakes get raised – and each step requires more forethought and careful planning. And the frequency drops – responses at the left-hand end of the spectrum are just part of everyday life. In each of the processes, though, the aim is the same, viz: calling the students to consider, to move towards, the needs of 'the other.'

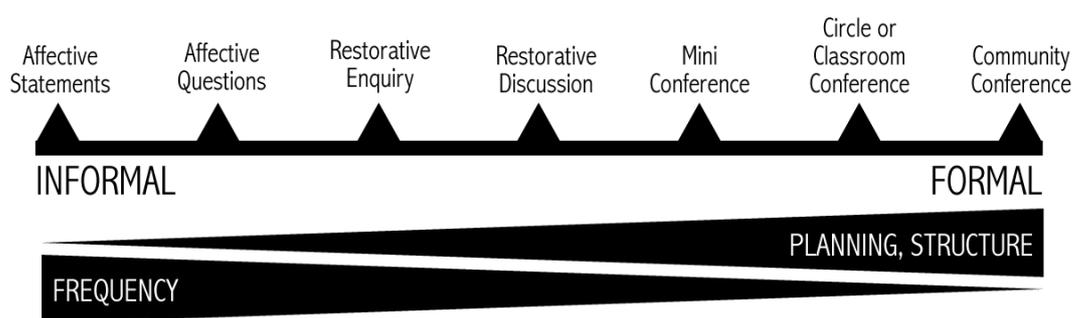


Figure 2 - The Restorative Continuum

The restorative process can be seen embodied in the standard sequence of questions that form the basis of the restorative encounter with an offender in the aftermath of wrongdoing:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you did?
- In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

These questions move the focus for the offender from the *past* (What were you thinking?) through the *present* (What have you thought about since?) towards the *future* (How can we make this right?). The questions take the offender through *storytelling* (being listened to, and heard), to *engagement* with the other, to considerations of *reparation*. They lead a person from a focus on the self, towards a focus on the other (George, 2015).

The standard questions for those affected by wrongdoing:

- What did you think when you realised what had happened?
- What impact has this incident had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

also move the victim from the *past*, towards the *future*. They affirm the victim’s story by hearing it, and then engage the emotional dimension, before looking towards repair of the harm experienced.

This storytelling is fundamental for building and maintaining healthy social relationships - it’s also how our own identity is formed and maintained. We are our story, our narrative, and we need our story to be heard in order to feel valued and respected (Pranis, 2000). Restorative practices is about enabling “re-storying” as much as it is about “restoring” – it enables and encourages offenders (and even victims) to envision and live into a different, more positive, personal narrative, drawing on the support of their community of care. Honouring the ‘story’ of those involved can also help to move the participants from negative, toxic emotions in the aftermath of conflict and wrongdoing, through vulnerability, towards a more positive resolution and a strengthening of relationships. The process *metabolises* the negative affect, ridding it of its power. This is important since it is a reality that much wrongdoing and conflict is emotionally-driven, and much harm is emotional harm. Restorative practices provides the opportunity for the free expression of emotion in a safe environment which is critical to the process of healing, and the development of empathy and compassion (George, 2015).

In a school environment, restorative practices are most effective when implemented and integrated across all aspects of the school’s operation. Since relationships are at the heart of behaviour management, teaching and learning, personal development and faith development – in fact, all that schools do, and all that form part of their students’ experience of schooling – a restorative approach underpinning the school’s efforts in each of these areas brings these relationships to the forefront. Integrating restorative approaches means not only repairing harm in the event of conflict or inappropriate behaviour, but also building and nurturing relationship and community in the first place (Johnstone, 2000; Morrison, 2005). This model includes: *primary prevention strategies* targeted at all students (‘innoculating’ them against conflict), *secondary prevention strategies* targeted at those students who may be at risk (maintaining and managing relationships), and *tertiary strategies* targeted at those students who have engaged in unacceptable behaviours where relationships need to be repaired (APA, 2008) as depicted in *Figure 3*.

The benefits that flow to a school community from such an integrated, responsive implementation of restorative practices include: the ability to be able to effectively and sensitively address the harm that results from wrongdoing; being able to better educate students towards self-directed right behaviour; to better promote, nurture and protect healthy relationships among members of the school community; and to enable wrongdoers to take responsibility for the real consequences of their actions. Most significant, perhaps, to faith-based school communities is the power of restorative practices to assist the school and its people in the movement from focussing on order, to rehabilitation, towards authentic community and *shalom*.

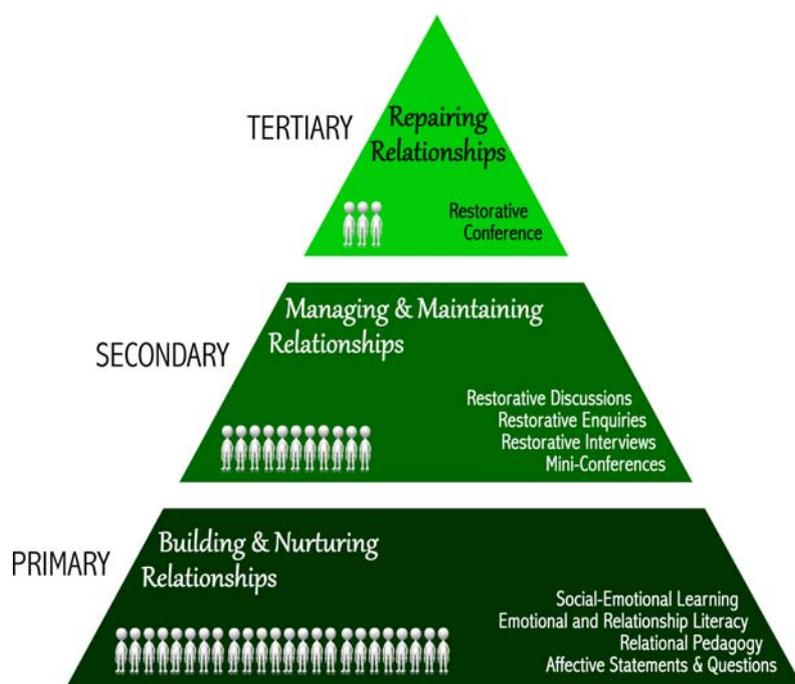


Figure 3 - Responsive Regulation - a Whole School Approach

Restorative Practices in the Catholic School

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2000) identifies that the approach to justice inspired by a Catholic vision can be seen as paradoxical – on the one hand, it does not tolerate behaviour that threatens or violates the rights of others and which demands responsibility and accountability and sometimes just punishment, while on the other hand a Catholic approach does not give up on those who violate these rights, since all of us – victim and offender alike – are children of God, made in His image and likeness. It is just this counter-cultural, somewhat paradoxical, approach that is described in the Vaandering ‘relationship window’ depicted in *Figure 1*, and which is central to the philosophy of restorative practices. The condemnation of *behaviour*, while ensuring the dignity of the *person*, is a key part of restorative practices.

The Bishops conclude that the Catholic approach to justice “leads [them] to encourage models of restorative justice” since these models emphasise viewing “crime in terms of the harm done to victims, not just as a violation of the law” (USCCB, 2000). It is this focus in restorative practices on repairing the harm done to victims and communities that can lead to healing and the constitutive peace key to *shalom*.

An essential part of the Christian message is the concept of forgiveness, mercy and healing leading to reconciliation. “This is what Jesus won for the human family on the Cross. These gifts form an essential part of what followers of Christ must practise in any age under all circumstances” (NZCBC, 1995). It is precisely this *reconciliation* that restorative practices has as its primary aim – a reconciliation not only between offender and victim, but also reconciliation of the victim and offender to their own selves. Engagement of the victim and the offender in the process of seeking solutions and working towards *shalom* is a central part of a restorative approach.

Pope (2010) goes as far as to refer to restorative justice as a ‘possibly prophetic path to peace that is needed for precisely the times we live in today.’ He offers that:

“The restorative justice movement might well be providing us with an opportunity to participate in creating both a more just and compassionate society and even a church that is more Christ-like.” (Pope, 2010)

Certainly, the two major themes of God’s unconditional love, and the possibility and power of redemption (Eph 1:7), underpin all of our Catholic faith tradition. We are a people relying securely upon God’s mercy and forgiveness, and a people who are ‘restored’ to right relationship with God through the life and passion of Jesus Christ. In following Christ, I believe we are called to seek *shalom* within our communities, and that this can best be achieved through our communities taking a restorative approach to building and nurturing relationships, and to dealing with conflict and wrongdoing when they occur.

Scriptural Tradition

Restoration was the primary focus of biblical justice systems and the Law was there to seek, protect and promote *shalom* (NZCBC, 1995). Even in the notion of ‘an eye for an eye,’ biblical tradition has a restorative focus.

The USCCB (2000) reminds us that the Old Testament teaches us that:

“Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or reintegration of all into the community.”

Such *contrition*, *reparation* and *return or reintegration* of all into the community is the aim of a restorative approach to wrongdoing.

The New Testament extends the justice tradition. Jesus rejected punishment for its own sake, noting that we are all sinners (Jn 8). In our own day, we are called to find Christ in young people at risk, troubled youth, prisoners in our jails and on death row, and crime victims experiencing pain and loss (Lk 4). The parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Lk 10) calls us to work to help victims recover from their distress and trauma, and the *Prodigal Son* (Lk 15) reminds us that the lost who have been found are to be welcomed and celebrated, not resented and rejected (USCCB, 2000).

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez identifies the story of *Zacchaeus* as “a clear example of how Jesus’ message can lead to the healing and restoration of relationships, so pivotal to restorative justice” (Ramirez, 2009). In each of these parables and episodes, healing and reconciliation are achieved through *relationship* – through our fundamental interrelatedness with one another, and with God. Restorative practices seeks to honour this interrelatedness by working *with* people *through relationship* towards healing.

For Denk (2008), the *pardon of the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house* (Lk 7:36-50) is a particular example of this *relational* justice according to Jesus:

A Pharisee invited [Jesus] to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This Gospel episode centers on [the sinful woman's] *restoration* to God, to her community, and indeed to her very self... through a justice of Jesus that is *relational*, that knows and sees her root dignity and faith (Denk, 2008). Further, he outlines two lessons that can be taken from this Gospel story, firstly that:

"...a Christian vision of justice for those who commit wrongs requires that we *see* – that we look upon – others *first as persons* (who have committed offenses), as persons *with whom we have a mutual relational claim*. That we *not*, that is, look at them simply as objects, as 'offenders' – thereby, rather, *overlooking* them."

and secondly, that:

"our duty, indeed our very ability, to fulfill the Greatest Commandment – the love commandment (cf. Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; John 13:34), *stems from* our being restored, and our restoration of others, to social and ecclesial communion." (Denk, 2008)

Combining these lessons, Denk (2008) concludes that the Christian vision of justice is *restorative*, and that it requires that we first see – and search for if we don't see – the root dignity of every person who has offended through crime or violence, seeing them as *subjects to engage* and to call to repentance and restoration, rather than *objects to manage* or *ignore*, or *objects of need*, as described in the Vaandering relationship window of *Figure 1*.

Sacramental Tradition

"Just as we look inside our own hearts during the penitential rite of every liturgy, to see and offer up our own offences, so too our ecclesial duty is to *see* the root dignity and personhood of every *other* offender in our midst." (Denk 2008)

The sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are real encounters with the Saving Lord and central Catholic signs of true justice and mercy. Sinners are encouraged to take responsibility and make amends for their sins; yet they never give up hope that they can be forgiven and rejoin the community. The four traditional elements of the sacrament of Penance embody the process of taking responsibility, making amends, and reintegrating into community, similar to that of the restorative process:

- *Contrition*: Genuine sorrow, regret, or grief over one's wrongs and a serious resolution not to repeat the wrong.
- *Confession*: Clear acknowledgment and true acceptance of responsibility for the hurtful behaviour.
- *Satisfaction*: The external sign of one's desire to amend one's life (this "satisfaction," whether in the form of prayers or good deeds, is a form of "compensation" or restitution for the wrongs or harms caused by one's sin)
- *Absolution*: After someone has shown contrition, acknowledged his or her sin, and offered satisfaction, then Jesus, through the ministry of the priest and in the company of the church community, forgives the sin and welcomes that person back into "communion" (USCCB, 2000).

Outside the sacramental situation, the restorative conference process can also lead to forgiveness and reconciliation, and to *shalom* in the community, and contains elements analogous to these four. The restorative conference brings offenders and victims together, with their communities of care, to enable clear acknowledgement and acceptance of responsibility for the harm done (*Confession*). During the course of the conference it is usual that, as the offender learns about and begins to understand the breadth and the depth of this harm, he expresses genuine sorrow and grief over his wrongs (*Contrition*). Working towards reparation or restitution (*Satisfaction*) occurs towards the end of the conference process, as the group works to find a way to repair some of the harm and prevent it happening again. The involvement and engagement of the offender's community of care encourages the reintegration of the offender back into the community (*Absolution*).

The restorative conference offers a structured, formal process for dealing with harm done as a result of conflict and wrongdoing which encourages conversion and reconciliation. More informal restorative processes, such as those that might be used everyday in schools, have similar aims and also encourage an attitude of continual conversion towards the good and the right. These informal restorative processes are part of the teaching role within the school, calling students (and ourselves and our colleagues) to consider 'the other' and to work for the common good.

Indeed, restorative practices enables, and calls, teachers in Catholic schools to participate in an active ministry of reconciliation. Those familiar with restorative practices in schools often readily identify such conference processes as being grace-filled, transformative experiences.

Catholic Social Teaching

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church (CSDCC) identifies the fundamental starting point for all of Catholic Social Teaching as the 'inviolable dignity of the human person', in whom there is 'the living image of God himself.' (CSDCC, 105,107). Both the most wounded victim, and the callous offender, retain their humanity.

Separating the condemnation of the *behaviour*, from the support of the *person*, in restorative practices seeks to recognise this fundamental dignity and worth of every person. Victims, too, must have their dignity protected. This requires that they are able to participate in any process of seeking restoration and *shalom*.

Flowing from the 'dignity, unity and equality of all people' is the principle of the common good (CSDCC, II) in which the fundamental interrelatedness of human beings is expressed socially in actions seeking the moral good for all. The problem-solving nature of restorative group processes call the group to work towards this common good and give the group responsibility for working together towards this end.

Central also to Catholic Social Teaching is the balance between rights and responsibilities. Dealing with conflict and wrongdoing puts us at the intersection of these rights and responsibilities. Our rights and responsibilities, however, are lived out in relationship with others (CSDCC, 110), and maintaining community and family connections can help offenders understand the harm they've done and prepare them for reintegration into society, which is the aim of restorative processes.

"Both the Old and New Testaments present an anthropology that conceives of the human person as relational – as regards God and as regards others – in terms of covenant. The story of creation, sin, grace, and redemption is one of relationship and of covenant which, when broken, calls for healing and restoration." (Denk, 2008)

In our tradition, restoring the balance of rights through restitution, and working to repair and nurture relationships damaged by wrongdoing, are important elements of justice, and these are central aims of restorative practices (USCCB, 2000).

In *Table 1* below, Denk (2008) correlates the *Four Guiding Principles of Restorative Justice* outlined above, with the major themes that constitute the body of Catholic social thought, through four nexuses. See Denk (2008) for a full exploration of this analysis.

Table 1 - Nexuses between Restorative Justice Themes and Catholic Social Thought (Denk 2008)

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE THEMES	CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT THEMES
Relationships precede rules	<p>2 Foundations +</p> <p>Anthropology of incarnation and covenant:</p> <p>1. <i>human dignity and respect for human life</i></p> <p>2. <i>the link of the religious and social dimensions of life</i></p>
Justice by participation rather than by proxy	<p>2 Justice Orientation +</p> <p>Justice as fidelity to the demands of a relationship:</p> <p>3. <i>the link between love – caritas – and justice</i></p> <p>6. <i>the balancing of rights and responsibilities</i></p> <p>9. <i>the value of association and subsidiarity</i></p>
Restoration of wounded communities, not just adjudication of offending individuals	<p>2 Restorative Orientation +</p> <p>Covenantal social ethics linking the religious and social:</p> <p>2. <i>the link of the religious and social dimensions of life</i></p> <p>4. <i>social/economic justice, “fidelity to the demands of a relationship”</i></p> <p>5. <i>the value of and right to equality and to political participation</i></p> <p>6. <i>the balancing of rights and responsibilities</i></p> <p>7. <i>solidarity and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable</i></p> <p>8. <i>stewardship and promotion of the common good</i></p> <p>9. <i>the value of association and subsidiarity</i></p>
The restorative justice continuum: from order, to rehabilitation, to shalom	<p>2 Restorative Vision +</p> <p>The integrative Gospel vision: peace and liberation:</p> <p>7. <i>solidarity and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable</i></p> <p>10. <i>promotion of peace and liberation from structural sin</i></p>

Denk’s (2008) exploration of restorative justice in the light of Catholic social thought leads him to conclude that restorative approaches offer:

“...opportunities, in the light of Jesus’ paschal mystery which necessarily orients Catholic Christian social thought... to encounter that Jesus and to ourselves be transformed by his restorative, redemptive action in our own lives.”

Conclusion

“Many people promise themselves that they will live a holy life. But, they fail because they go into the furnace and come out cracked.” (*St Augustine, Expositions on the Psalms* 99, 11)

We have all been tested in the furnace, and we are all cracked pots. Human frailty means that our relationships *will not* be perfect, and that there *will* be conflict and wrongdoing in our communities from time to time. In searching for ways of dealing with these human imperfections and failings that can nurture and strengthen our fundamental inter-relatedness, our Catholic faith and tradition can point the way. Our theological, scriptural and sacramental heritage offers hope of redemption and restoration through our relationship with Christ. The pathway is through right and just relationships – with ourselves, with each other, and with God.

We know that our educational work in classrooms and schools is mediated by the influence of the relationships that exist between teacher and student. St Augustine identified this centuries ago, and modern educational research ‘confirms’ it. That relationships are central to our work in schools has become self-evident. Experience, and recent research, also suggests that the traditional approaches to behaviour management and discipline in schools are ineffective and may in fact be counter-productive to our higher aims for schooling.

What is needed is a focus on developing and nurturing right relationships across our schools, and approaches which effectively enable us to repair and restore these relationships when things go wrong. What is needed are practical processes that help us bring abstract notions such as reconciliation and restoration into day-to-day reality in such a way that our Catholic values are more than just platitudes. Restorative practices offers this focus and approach, and these processes. Restorative practices recognises that we are relational beings and that the key issue when conflict or wrongdoing occurs is the harm that is caused to people and relationships, and the obligations that follow from that harm. The restorative approach helps us build and nurture relationships in schools and provides the means to work to repair relationships when things go wrong.

The relational nature of restorative practices reflects the relational nature of the Old and New Testament visions of justice. Restorative practices allows us to be true to the somewhat paradoxical view of justice, mercy and compassion that stems from our Catholic tradition and reflects the major tenets of the Church’s Social Teaching. Restorative practices is congruent with the view of justice as rightly-ordered relationships with ourselves, with others, and with God. Our values provide a pathway to these rightly-ordered relationships – restorative practices invites all teachers (and other adults in a school) to participate in an active ministry of reconciliation.

While nothing in education is ever a panacea for all ills, the schoolwide implementation of restorative practices – integrated and embedded across all aspects of the school’s activity – enables us to work *with* our colleagues and our young people in ways which build community, strengthen right relationships, give voice (and flesh and blood) to our shared Gospel values on a day-to-day basis, and which enables us to seek *shalom* within our school.

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