

## **Restorative Approaches in Schools in the UK**

A workshop and paper prepared for the Fourth International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices, 28 – 30<sup>th</sup> August 2003, Veldhoven, Netherlands

There has been much of a restorative nature happening in many UK schools for a long time, if one considers restorative approaches as a set of principles, skills and processes that seek to heal the harm caused by conflict and anti-social behaviour through involving those affected in finding constructive ways forward. However, these initiatives are not necessarily widespread, nor are they necessarily part of a coherent, whole school strategy.

My conference workshop and this paper identify the various restorative elements to be found in UK schools and indicates how the jigsaw pieces are gradually being brought together. I begin by describing some approaches which, though not always identified as restorative by their advocates, are nevertheless at the heart of a restorative approach. I go on to describe current developments in the field of Restorative Approaches in Schools, explicitly identified as such, but in the context of other initiatives that have paved the way. Finally I look at what restorative principles, skills and approaches are needed in schools, suggest what a training course might include, and consider the challenges that lie ahead in developing a Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice.

I accept that what follows is a personal perspective, based on my own experience and involvement in the development of restorative approaches in schools locally and nationally. If my story is at odds with those reading this, or I have omitted an important element that others think is relevant, then I would welcome constructive criticism or the information I lack. My workshop will certainly be inviting others to tell their own story.

### **Circle Time – Establishing core values and basic interpersonal needs**

Only this week (mid August 2003) Bob Costello raised a question on the SaferSanerSchools e-mail list about making explicit the value base behind what we are trying to do. I have found it useful to start workshops/training sessions by asking everyone to consider the following question:

*What do we need from each other to work at our best?*

Participants in one workshop recently came up with the following list – and it is fairly representative of what others have listed in the past:

- Space
- Time
- A sense of team
- To make mistakes
- Honesty and openness
- Compromise and flexibility
- Humour
- Respect
- Lack of confrontation
- Support
- Fairness
- Trust
- Reliability
- Punctuality
- Being listened to and understood
- Communication
- Being valued

To my mind this list identifies not only our essential needs from others, but also a set of core values, since if we need these things from others then we are likely to agree these things are what we owe to others and indeed to ourselves.

Exploring core values in a school setting is not new. Teachers of P.H.S.E. (Pastoral, Social and Health Education), Citizenship, Religious Studies and many other subjects will spend time discussing values during a school year. The extent to which these values become lived and honoured by the whole school community is a matter for debate however.

An increasingly widespread practice in U.K. primary schools (ages 5 – 11 years old) used to help foster the kind of values, skills and qualities listed above, is a process called **Circle Time**.

Restorative practitioners will be familiar with using circles to discuss issues and to resolve problems. Circle Time can be used for this too, but it generally needs to be developed slowly by engaging young people in playful activities that help to build self-esteem, communication and co-operation skills. Materials abound to help teachers with their planning of Circle Time, (Bliss *et al.* 1995; Bliss & Tetley 1993; Mosley 1996) which usually consists of

- an introductory ‘Go-round’ during which everyone gets to say at least one thing
- a lively Mixer Game to jumble people up and encourage them to talk to others in their peer group
- a slightly lengthier thought provoking activity, maybe done in pairs or small groups
- a de-brief on what has been learnt or noticed,
- another game, maybe developing cooperation skills,
- a closing go-round reflecting on the whole session

Circle Time can build a good sense of team in the class if it is run regularly, ideally once a week. Key elements include sitting in a circle, using a talking piece to ensure everyone has a chance to speak and an opportunity to listen, and subscribing to a set of mutually agreed guidelines. The process helps everyone to feel connected, and to develop a sense of responsibility for each others’ well being. I believe it creates the seedbed from which all other restorative practices can grow. The list of needs above, for example, are a fair reflection what can be achieved over a year with a group of young people.

I and many people working in schools developing Circle Time, are at pains to persuade the adults in a school to recognise the value of Circles for themselves as well. We always use the Circle format for initial training so that adults can experience the benefits of participation for themselves, and the feedback is often about the personal benefits of meeting, talking to and having fun with others in their team whom they usually do not spend time with.

### **Repairing harm -Conflict Resolution and Mediation**

Just as Circle Time is gaining popularity thanks to the introduction of the PHSE and Citizenship curriculum into schools in the past few years, so the interest in mediation is growing. Conflict resolution is part of the Citizenship programme and there is no better way for young people to understand how to resolve conflicts and help others to do so, than by learning the skills of mediation.

Models of mediation vary tremendously around the world but the predominant model in the UK is one in which the full ownership of finding a way forward (or choosing not to) is given to those in the conflict. (Bentley *et al.* 1998; Farrington 2000) Young peer mediators are trained to refrain from making judgments, from taking sides and from giving advice, but instead encouraged to hold the space in which those in conflict can find a way forward by themselves. They learn that when conflict happens both sides have needs, and that if these needs go unmet the ripple effect of the harm can spread not only through the school, but out of the school gates into families and into the wider community.

Years of experience has now taught UK practitioners that in order for peer mediation projects to thrive and make a difference in the school community the ethos underpinning mediation, what restorative practitioners would call a restorative ethos, needs to be something shared by the whole school community. A 'Whole School Approach' is now widely advocated by peer mediation trainers although interpretations vary from those who claim it is sufficient that everyone in the school knows about the process and is prepared to support the young mediators (Griffiths 2003) to those who advocate that everyone in the school community, young and old, need to understand and use the main principles on a day to day basis. (Cremin 2002; Hopkins 2003; Tyrrell 2002)

Circle Time and Peer Mediation then, are relatively well established around the country and increasing in popularity. However, the fact that I am unable to provide statistics to show how widespread these practices are points to the general lack of a coordinated approach to the roll –out and development of the two. Individual organisations, statutory, voluntary and private, offer training and support in either one or the other and occasionally both. It would be rare for training providers to refer to these approaches in the same breath as the words Restorative Justice and it is possible that many of them would not have come across the term.

Nevertheless, I hope my description of them helps to explain to other restorative practitioners why I believe these are key pieces of a Whole School Restorative Jigsaw, and why it is important to know that they are already well established in many schools, albeit sometimes in isolation from the rest of the school ethos.

**‘Restorative Justice in Schools’ – asking different questions**

The explicit use of restorative justice approaches and principles in schools is relatively new in the UK. I began using the phrase ‘restorative justice in schools’ soon after Terry O’Connell from New South Wales, Australia, first visited the Thames Valley (where I live and work) and gave a series of talks to multi-agency groups. I immediately saw the links between restorative conferencing and the community building, conflict management and mediation work I had been doing in schools since the early 90’s. I also saw its’ radical potential in challenging the deep-seated belief in schools that when a young person does wrong they should be punished for it. After all, a restorative approach involves asking a different set of questions.

Traditional Questions	Restorative Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• Who is to blame?</li> <li>• What is the appropriate response to deter and possibly punish those at fault, so they will not do the same thing again?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What’s happened?</li> <li>• Who has been affected?</li> <li>• How can we involve everyone who has been affected in finding a way forward?</li> <li>• How can everyone do things differently in the future?</li> </ul>

Soon after Terry’s visit, training in restorative conferencing began in earnest by the Thames Valley Police and certain police officers began using this process in schools. (One of them, Graham Waddington, has just been awarded the Police Queen’s Medal for his work in the field) The success they were having helped to raise awareness about its potential in a school setting. Meanwhile I had been trained as a conference facilitator and invited to join a working group to look at how this approach could be developed in schools. I was even more convinced that conferencing and mediation shared a lot in common and had huge potential in school settings.

By the time the first International Conference on Restorative Justice was held in Winchester in 2001 the Times Educational Supplement, a newspaper read widely by educationalists around the UK, published a two-page article about Restorative Justice in schools. In this article the police experience of running conferences, other initiatives including the one in Nottingham (see below) and the success of some peer

mediation projects were all described under the banner of Restorative Justice in Schools.

Some of the participants from the training course I had attended (run by Les Davey and Stuart McNeilly<sup>1</sup>) had taken the ideas for schools back to Nottingham and an innovative project was started there. The project leader, Robin Tinker, has been working in several schools, using restorative conferences and mini-conferences (what I would call face-to-face mediation) to address issues such as bullying and interpersonal conflict. The project goes from strength to strength, and Robin and his team are now training others to run the conferences and meetings.

From these small beginnings things began to happen. The Winchester conference of March 2001, where Marg Thorsborne from Australia and I were lucky enough to be given plenary spots to talk about our work in schools, put the schools aspect of Restorative Justice firmly on the map. Charles Pollard, then Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, said, at that conference, that he believed it was probably in schools that Restorative Justice had the greatest potential. Since the conference interest grew. Enquiries became more frequent. Discussions were being had in high places.

### **A climate for change? – factors encouraging the development of Restorative Approaches in schools**

One factor in the growth of Restorative Approaches in the UK is the concern over the increase in offending behaviour by young people. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) has been established to oversee a raft of initiatives to reduce such crime and to tackle the issues that can lead to offending behaviour. Part of the YJB's remit is to support the national Youth Offending Teams (Y.O.T's), multi-agency teams based locally around England and Wales who deal directly with the young people who have offended or who are at risk of offending. Much of their work is with school aged young people and every Y.O.T. has links to local schools through the educationalists on their team. As interest in Restorative Justice has grown in the criminal justice field inevitably many Y.O.T.'s have seen its potential in school settings.

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<sup>1</sup> Then police officers pioneering restorative conferencing, Les is now the Director of Real Justice UK and Stuart works as a freelance trainer in the field.

Another factor is some recent Home Office research, which suggests that those young people who are either excluded from school or truanting are more likely to be drawn into offending behaviour. There has been pressure on Local Education Authorities and on schools to reduce the number of exclusions and to raise attendance. In part this is simply to reduce the numbers of unsupervised and disaffected young people at large on the streets. However it is also recognised that schools have a potentially supportive and educative role, if only they can meet the needs of those who are disaffected.

From a schools perspective this pressure to reduce exclusion has not always been welcome. It is apparently at odds with the other pressure on teachers, which is to raise educational standards and achieve government- set targets of achievement. Many teachers I have spoken to regret the over- emphasis on academic targets at the expense of time spent on educating the whole child. They believe that a more holistic approach, including emphasis on emotional literacy and social skills, could more effectively address the issues behind exclusion and non-attendance. Target –setting has forced many teachers into a more authoritarian, top-loading teaching style that does not accommodate for different learning styles and differing needs. Indeed, this way of teaching has increasingly alienated the very young people who need to be engaged and challenged if they are not to fall off the edge. This sense of alienation and exclusion has led to further disruptive behaviour, which, if the rest of the class are not to suffer as well, has led to more exclusions. Teachers have been caught up in a double – bind and are looking for help.

In response, the Department for Education and Employment have introduced several new initiatives focussed on improving behaviour. One of them, the Behaviour Improvement Plan (B.I.P.) targets those areas of greatest need around the country, where social factors conspire to create economic, social and educational disadvantage and where the consequent distress manifests itself in disruptive, challenging and often anti-social behaviour.

B.I.P. managers have been tasked with developing Behaviour and Educational Support teams (BEST) who can help teachers deal with the increasingly difficult job of delivering the National Curriculum to young people who do not see its relevance in their lives. Elsewhere in the country Behaviour and Attendance initiatives are being

targeted at Key Stage Three students (between 11- 14 years old), focussing on the issues underlying challenging behaviour and poor attendance.

The picture painted so far, rough sketch though it may be, indicates that both youth justice professionals and educationalists agree that reducing exclusion, raising attendance and addressing anti-social and offending behaviour are priorities.

Furthermore, there seems to be increasing commitment to approaches that seek to meet the needs of the young people at risk, address the issues that lead to disaffection and build the self-esteem and the skill base of such young people in an attempt to put them back on the 'right track'.

### **Partnership between youth justice professionals and educationalists**

In this climate of diversion and support it is not surprising that Restorative Approaches are being welcomed in some quarters. Although in schools themselves partnership between Youth Justice professionals and educationalists may not always be seen as relevant, at government and strategic level they certainly are being seen as increasingly important.

The Department for Education and Employment (D.F.E.E.) has joined forces with the Home Office, the Youth Justice Board, the Association of Chief Education Officers (A.C.E.O.) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (A.C.P.O.) to deliver a project called the Safer Schools Partnership (S.S.P.) This project, initially involving 100 police officers, each working alongside an educationalist colleague in a school on a full-time basis, aims to reduce crime and the fear of crime in school settings and also to involve young people in taking more responsibility for what happens in schools and in developing their conflict resolution skills.

Fortunately the project developers realised that the teams working in schools would need restorative skills to be able to fulfil their task effectively and so all 200 people were expected to have training in such skills. Although the main focus of the S.S.P. training in Restorative Justice has been restorative conferencing, the team of trainers, all experienced in school or other educational settings, were keen to widen the participants' view to the wider potential of restorative skills across the board. ( Marg Thorsborne and I were consultants on the first pilot project and we helped to give this Whole School input.) The impact of the training has yet to be evaluated but the



introduction of restorative skills to police officers and educationalists across the country is having an impact on people's thinking .

The S.S.P. project targets essentially the very same geographical areas that the B.I.P. projects work in, for essentially similar reasons. To date some B.I.P. managers are aware of the potential of Restorative Approaches in furthering their own aims and objectives. Others are not, and strategies are being developed to some extent in parallel. Similarly not all S.S.P. teams are fully aware of what their local BEST teams are offering in school and there is scope for closer cooperation.

It must be pointed out that the government's interest in Restorative Justice as a key component of their Criminal Justice Strategy is growing all the time. ( later I refer to their draft strategy, currently circulated for consultation) It is unlikely that the increasing interest in using Restorative Approaches in the school context would be happening at quite the speed it is, and unlikely that restorative skills would have even been considered for the school based police officers, were it not for these developments nationally. However I wanted to point out that national initiatives in education and in the field of criminal justice are moving in the same direction, and I believe this to be a key element in the potential success of establishing a restorative approach in schools across the UK.

Other areas, not within the Safer School Partnerships targeted regions, want to get involved, and organisations offering training are being deluged with enquiries. Similarly those Behaviour Improvement Plan managers who have come across Restorative Justice can see its relevance for their work, and are keen to train their staff. One challenge is the dearth of trainers with the flexibility to offer what teachers and behavioural support staff need on a day-to-day basis, and who also have some background and experience in educational settings themselves.

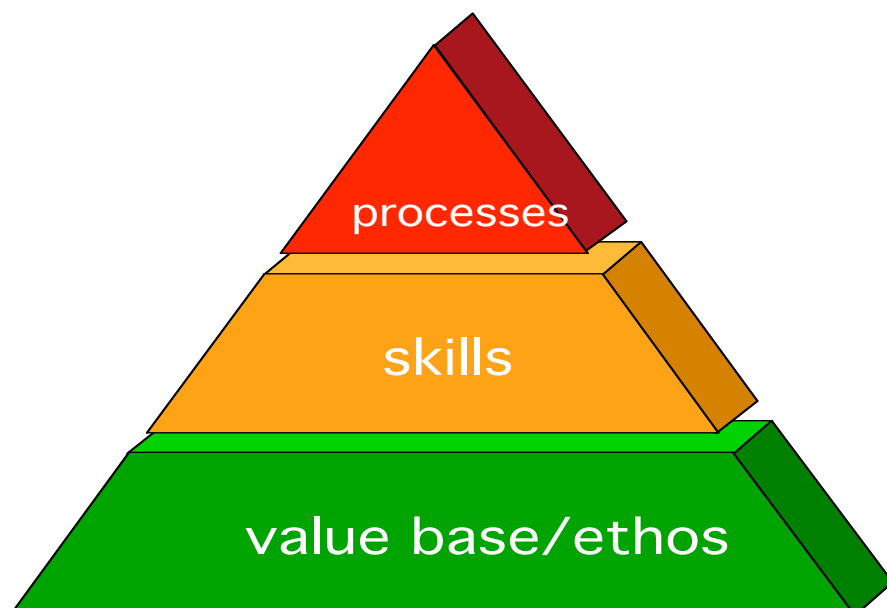
Another potentially influential project, also sponsored by the Youth Justice Board, is one involving the Youth Offending Teams. The Schools Pilot is initially involving 8 Youth Offending Teams, each of which is developing their project in different ways. Some Project Managers are beginning by training outside facilitators to offer restorative interventions to schools when the need is perceived. Some are beginning by developing peer mediation teams in schools. One I am closely involved with is

training teams of teachers in restorative skills and supporting them in applying these in their own schools. This pilot is being evaluated by a team who are looking at key performance indicators such as reduction in exclusions and the raising of attendance but also at perceptions amongst young people and staff of changes that have occurred around feeling safe in school.

Like the Safer Schools Partnership Project (S.S.P.) the Youth Offending Team project is raising awareness elsewhere in the country and many other Youth Offending Teams are seeking funding to begin their own projects. Fortunately there is funding available from a variety of sources since there is widespread concern about young people's situation today, including disaffection, rising crime, child victimisation, bullying, increasing violence towards and by young people – to name a few. Once again, the main challenge is the shortage of relevant training programmes and experienced trainers in the field. It is the former topic I wish to concentrate on for the rest of this workshop/article.

### **What restorative principles, skills and approaches are needed in schools?**

I began the workshop/paper focussing on what people need from each other to work at their best. The need for support, inclusion and a sense of belonging, mutual respect and feeling valued are perhaps the most recurring themes whenever I ask this question, amongst young and old. These need to be the foundation of restorative practice, its' essential value base:



Other recurring themes from the list of what people need include: someone to listen to me, effective communication, openness to new ideas and perspectives, and sharing ideas. I would argue that these are essential skills for a restorative practitioner, and essential for everyone in an organisation seeking to run itself along restorative lines.

This simple question then:

*What do you need from others to work at your best?*

highlights immediately some potential training needs. School staff and students will often look at their list and agree that it is idealist, and often far from what is actually happening in their classes or staff teams.

In my experience, starting a training course with this question paves the way for some in-depth review of the way we listen to each other and the way we speak to each other. Empathic listening and non-violent communication (Rosenberg 1999) need to be the fundamental skills used by those in a restorative organisation or community.

Two further questions help to emphasise the need for these basic skills even more:

*What do I need when I have been harmed?*

*What do I need when I have harmed others?*

Harm here has been defined as any emotional, mental, physical or material distress or damage that one person can inflict on another, intentionally or not. This broad definition helps people to see that in any busy school harm happens on a daily basis and engenders a lot of needs. These needs, more often than not, go unmet, and unmet needs can lead to the ripple effect of bitterness, disharmony, resentment, tensions and conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Participants in a recent workshop came up with the following list:

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Peta Blood, from Circleworks in Australia, for these questions.

<b>What do you need when you've been harmed?</b>	<b>What do I need when I have harmed someone else?</b>
An apology and amends made	A chance to explain apologise
An empathetic listener	Time to put things right
A chance to talk	To feel better about it
Have my voice heard	To be forgiven
The other person to understand what has upset us	To get back on friendly terms
To be respected	To reassure them/yourself it won't happen again
To be allowed to have emotion	To make it up to them
Support and positive reinforcement	
To be able to problem solve	
To draw a line underneath it	

When invited to consider the ripple effect of harm in a relatively small community such as a school, staff can relate to the way that situations can escalate if not 'nipped in the bud'. When asked to consider the needs and feelings of all those likely to have been harmed in some way, it becomes evident that punitive responses fail to meet the needs or address the feelings of the majority of people.

Time constraints weigh heavy on school staff and they are keen for approaches that can be used without too much preparation or time. Although they recognise that a restorative conference or circle can be beneficial in more serious situations, they also welcome the more immediate, and more easily arranged, face-to-face process I would describe as mediation, not to mention strategies to use in the moment to de-escalate challenging situations.

In both the Safer Schools Partnership project and the Youth Offending Team project, teachers and restorative facilitators attest to the value of the smaller mediation or 'mini-conference' as some people refer to it, which can nip issues in the bud. They also say that simply by listening more, issues do not spiral into something that needs mediation. There still is a place for the larger meetings however, and the ability to

facilitate Circles of various sorts is an essential skills for teachers, even if they simply use them to build community and resolve problems within their classrooms.

In essence then, I have found that what teachers and others working in schools need on a day to day basis is to be able to

- Listen with empathy and without judgement
- Deal with challenging situations – one to one
- Mediate others' conflicts
- Facilitate restorative conferencing and problem-solving circles

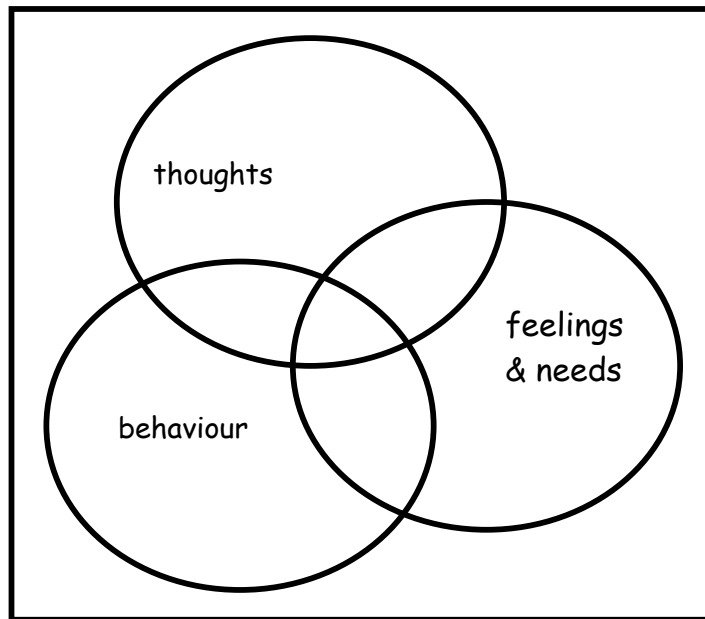
These four components form the basis of the course my own organisation offers to educationalists and also to students in schools. We are trying to integrate key themes and skills through the whole course so that people appreciate that the skills and questions one uses when listening empathically to one person are exactly the same as those appropriate when working in a circle. I call these the four magic questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking?
- What were you feeling?
- What do you need now to move on?

These questions, or ones similar, will be recognisable to many restorative practitioners, I am sure. What may be different is the way we have themed these through all our training, from one –to-one listening to circle work.

### **Training considerations**

The way we train people to become familiar with this approach is developing all the time. We use a simple model inspired by Di Margetts from Australia who has established an organisation in the UK called Protective Behaviours. She highlights the fact that what we think influences how we feel, and this in turn influences what we choose to do, and that these interlocking pieces continue to play in us, and others , all the time. I think that Marshal Rosenberg's insights about how our feelings influence our needs comes into play here too and have adapted Di's diagram:



Of course people need to practice using these questions sensitively and not think they are only asked once. A good way to think of the first three questions is as a spiral, so that each new bit of a story is spiralled around using the questions as a basis (an idea inspired by a course I ran with Tony Walker from the Thames Valley Police recently, introducing young students aged between 9 and 12, to mediation and conferencing) ‘So when that happened, what were you thinking/how did you feel? And then ..? ..... And what were your thoughts then? How were you feeling?’ And so on. Eventually there is a sense that the speaker has had a chance to re-visit the incident in as much depth as they want, and then everyone else is offered the same opportunity. It is only after this that the fourth question is asked around the group.

I have found that this set of questions can be the basis of training in empathic listening, since we need to be curious about how others see things, (their story), their thoughts and interpretations of events, their feelings and needs.

Once people are comfortable with this approach, we build on it by asking people to try using the questions even when emotionally involved themselves. Curiosity in others’ thoughts, feelings and needs is essential in resolving our own interpersonal conflicts . With carefully supported role play people can practice de-escalating challenging situations that they find themselves in with students, parents or colleagues. It is suggested that a restorative discussion would include both sides taking turns to express how they see things (their thoughts about what is happening or happened), and how they are feeling , whilst the listener simply listens and

acknowledges the often differing viewpoint. From this exchange people are often ready to explore mutually acceptable ways to meet both sides' needs.

The next step is to use the same set of questions in helping others to resolve conflict face-to-face – what we would call 'mediation' - and this technique is then only a short step away from using the same questions when more than two people are involved in a conflict or harmful situation.

In our experience theming one set of questions through the different situations has helped people to be flexible when at work. Of course we do not encourage slavish attachment to the actual words, but we think that the questions support people in adopting a restorative approach. By sticking essentially to the four questions the facilitator ensures that refrain from being judgmental, expressing their opinion, offering solutions or advice or taking sides. Even when using them for one's own conflicts they help maintain a sense of curiosity and respect for the differences initially and encourage a search for common ground when exploring needs latterly.

In order to breathe life, meaning and sensitivity into the questions and the processes the core restorative values are visited and re-visited, in our training style, in group discussions, in thinking about integrating the practices into school and in developing new school policies.

### **The way forward in the UK – the progress so far and the challenges ahead**

The Government is in the process of developing its Restorative Strategy and refers to its potential in schools in the consultative document that is being circulated at the moment. The document refers specifically to Circle Time, Peer Mediation and Mentoring as processes already in schools, as well as the two national projects described here. Comments have been invited, specifically about the type of training required and what accreditation will be needed. My own organisation is exploring accreditation for teachers' courses as well as relevant and appropriate accreditation for young people training as restorative facilitators and mediators. We have circulated a questionnaire to teachers who have been trained already to ensure their voices are heard in the consultation about what they believe they and their students need and what accreditation would be relevant (this questionnaire is available on request) Other training providers such as Real Justice UK are also ensuring that the hard work of their participants is recognised through an accreditation provided by the Open College Network.

The Restorative Justice Consortium developed a set of Practice Standards for Restorative Practice some years back and have recently been adapting these to fit the schools context. The standards reflect the Consortium's commitment to supporting schools develop a Whole School Approach and are available on request from the Consortium. ([info@restorativejustice.org.uk](mailto:info@restorativejustice.org.uk))

Relevant accreditation for teachers and support staff is a step towards validating restorative approaches and recognising the time and commitment it takes to develop such skills. It can also establish standards for training and delivery and some degree of shared practice and understanding around the country. Ideally such training would be a part of every new teacher's initial training and encouraged for every existing teacher to support them in working in what are often perceived as increasingly unsafe environments.

The Practice Standards have been produced as guidelines to aspire to. The consortium has adapted existing Standards and also Dan Van Ness's continuum of more or less restorative organisations, so that schools can identify targets and stages in their transformation.

One major challenge is for individuals considering themselves 'restorative' working in essentially retributive environments. At present the majority of people who are being trained in schools-based restorative approaches finds themselves in a minority back at school. The challenges include

- feeling isolated
- not having senior management support and understanding
- lack of time to organise meetings
- lack of time and resources to train more staff
- sustainability
- gaining the support of the whole school community, including parents.

My own belief is that the interest in Restorative Justice is like a stone gathering moss as it rolls down the hill. As more people hear about it in the media, perhaps have an experience of it for themselves, read about it or hear from friends, the isolation and the lack for support will diminish.



Credibility will increase as accreditation and quality standards become established. Young people themselves will ask for it and want to become facilitators themselves.

In the last ten years Restorative Justice has come of age, and those of us who were waving flags in the wilderness all that time ago are standing now in the glare of government and media interest blinking, and pinching ourselves to see if we are dreaming. We are living the dream now and need to keep on trusting in the process. However, reality beckons as well, and the challenges of spreading Restorative Approaches into every school in the UK are not to be sneezed at. Gatherings like this conference help to replenish the batteries and convince us all that the hard work has been worth it, and will continue to be worth it.

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Belinda Hopkins,  
Transforming Conflict,  
Centre for Restorative Justice in Education  
Mortimer Hill,  
Mortimer,  
Berkshire,  
RG7 3PW

tel: 00 44 (0)118 9331520

e-mail: [belinda@transformingconflict](mailto:belinda@transformingconflict)

website: [www.transformingconflict.org](http://www.transformingconflict.org)

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