WORKING RESTORATIVELY IN SCHOOLS

A Guidebook For Developing Safe And Connected Learning Communities

Bill Hansberry

CONTENTS:

This chapter brings Silvan Tomkin's and Donald Nathanson's Human Affect Theory, in particular, the emotion of Shame-Humiliation, to an accessible level for many teachers. It also explains how Restorative Practices and Circle Time foster healthy school communities.

This chapter is a thought-provoker for educators about current forms of school discipline and the implications of these practices on students' sense of belonging at school.

This chapter, co-written with Margaret Thorsborne, helps teachers to unpack the Restorative Script so they can better understand some of the mechanics behind the basic script and use the Restorative Questions more effectively.

This chapter, co-written with Jane Langley, explores some important considerations for working restoratively with Early Years students. This chapter can be paired with Chapter 5 for staff professional learning sessions.

This chapter, again, co-written with Jane Langley, suggests a set of Restorative Questions that are developmentally appropriate for Early Years students. This chapter can be paired with Chapter 4 for professional learning sessions.

Based on the Real Justice General Conflict Script, this resource provides a process where the basic Restorative Questions are adapted for helping small groups of students work through conflicts where all sides of the issue have both caused a degree of harm and been affected.

Section 4: After The Restorative Conference: What Now?

Chapter 7: What You Need To Know About Formal Restorative Conference Agreements

This chapter gives information about which types of Restorative Conferences may require a formal written Conference Agreement and how Restorative Conference Agreements may be linked to student behaviour plans.

Chapter 8: A Restorative Agreement Template For Schools

This is an example of a template for formal Restorative Conference Agreements. It gives guidance about what to include in its different sections so the agreement is an accurate record of the conference outcomes, and supports future agreement review meetings.

Chapter 9: Recording And Managing Newly Created Restorative Conference Agreements: Information For Schools

This chapter gives schools step-by-step guidance on recording and managing newly created Restorative Conference Agreements. Suggestions are also given on how to distribute Conference Agreement information to all stakeholders

Chapter 10: After The Conference: Relationship Management And Agreement Accountability

This article discusses how formal Conference Agreements become the centrepiece for a process of ongoing relationship management between students following a Restorative Conference. Advice is given on the delicate subject of handling breaches of agreement conditions whilst supporting the repair of relationships at the same time.

Chapter 11: A Process For Reviewing Agreements With Students: Beginning The Relationship Management And Accountability Process

This chapter gives teachers a clear guide to follow when reviewing Restorative Conference Agreements with students, as well as giving tips about how to address some of the complexities that arise out of the Agreement Review process.

This chapter shows an example of a 'Summary of Conference Agreements' that can be distributed to all relevant teaching staff so they are aware of which students have active agreements and what these agreements entail.

This chapter offers an example of a letter that can go home to parents/caregivers to explain the Restorative Conference Agreement. It offers suggestions to parents as to how they can support their child in adhering to the Conference Agreement. This letter accompanies the copy of the Restorative Conference Agreement that is sent to parents/caregivers following a Restorative Conference.

This chapter gives an example of a formal letter that can go home to parents/caregivers when a Conference Agreement involving their child has been made 'inactive'. This is a way to share the good news with parents that their child has done the agreed work to repair and has restored their relationships with others.

This chapter gives important information about the follow up processes that need to be used to increase the likelihood of sustainable improved classroom or group culture following a No-Blame Classroom Conference. *(Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2002)*

FOREWORD:

I was delighted when Bill Hansberry asked me to write the foreword, for a couple of reasons: Bill was, when I first met him some years ago, well on the way to understanding the restorative philosophy and the benefits to young people, their families and their schools. That in itself is pretty encouraging—someone who "gets it" in an instant. Secondly, he's wasted no time in experimenting on the ground, and developing some very useful resources for schools.

The progress that schools in all parts of the world have made in taking up the challenges of culture change and moving away from retributive policies and practices is very heartening. But it is so very easy for any of us, even the most mindful, to snap back into ways that were defined by older, more traditional punitive habits, despite knowing better. This kind of slippage is not an uncommon part of the change process and we need as much help as possible to remain clear about what we are trying to achieve, and to keep practising new skills until they are second nature to us.

One of the things that I have always encouraged is for *all of us* to read as much as we can lay our hands on to increase our knowledge and understanding of this approach and its various practices and models. Bill, I know, reads avidly, experiments constantly, keen to help his own understanding of the hows and whys, and to translate this into something that will help others in their practice.

And so, what we have here in this resource is a wide-ranging variety of ideas, theories and suggestions which should deepen your understanding of how to use Restorative Practices, why and how they work, combined with clear guidelines for the practicalities of doing this work in schools.

This Guide is an important contribution to the stable of resources that supports this important restorative work in schools. We must all take responsibility for helping our young people develop into caring, kind, thoughtful, compassionate adults and citizens. Ultimately this work, and the ongoing commitment of practitioners like Bill, will help towards the development of a more peaceful approach to problem-solving, so utterly critical for us at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Marg Thorsborne,
Director, Margaret Thorsborne and Associates
March, 2009

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK:

People who are new to Restorative Justice in schools and those wishing to deepen their understanding of working restoratively will find this guide useful in providing some necessary background about Restorative Practice, as well as being exposed to ways that restorative approaches can be successfully built into a school-wide approach.

Educators with experience in working restoratively will find this guide a valuable resource to assist them to bring a whole-school approach to Restorative Justice processes. A series of chapters that give straightforward advice on the finer details of supporting Restorative Conferencing will help schools to refine their whole-school communication and behaviour review processes.

Teachers wishing to better employ the restorative questioning approach (the Restorative Script) will benefit from a series of chapters that focus on the Restorative Script and ways it can be adapted for different situations and different students. In particular, Early Years teachers will find a very helpful section on working restoratively with young children inspired by the work of Jane Langley.

This is not intended to be a stand-alone 'How To' guidebook for working restoratively in educational settings. It is a resource to assist the implementation at both a micro and organisational change level. As you will see, many of the ideas and concepts covered in this guidebook build on the pioneering work of Australian restorative practitioners, some of whom, you will hear from in the chapters that follow. It is my hope that this Guidebook will take its place among other Restorative Practices in schools resources, and with them, guide educators to develop fair and connected school communities.

In writing this, we have tried to avoid the terms 'victim' and 'offender' and have replaced them with terms like "the wrongdoer/student who caused the harm" and "those affected/harmed". Where these terms have been used within a particular context, it has been to try to assist the reader's understanding of the concept being discussed. We believe the terms "victim" and "offender" are not helpful labels for school-aged children.

This Guide Contains 15 Chapters, Divided Into 4 Sections

SECTION 1 gives a brief overview of Restorative Practices in schools and points the reader to later chapters that further expand on ideas and concepts raised in this introductory section.

SECTION 2 contains two chapters. Chapter 1 lays some important theoretical foundations for Restorative Practices and Circle Time and discusses the emotion of shame and community building as the common link between these two practices. Chapter 2, co-written with Travis Bartlett, aims to encourage some deeper thinking about current school disciplinary approaches.

SECTION 3, consisting of Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, explores the Restorative Questions (the Restorative Script) in depth. Chapter 3 is a combined effort between Margaret Thorsborne and I that aims to give teachers a greater understanding of the Restorative Questions so they can use them with greater potency in their day-to-day interactions with students. Chapters 3 and 5 bring the experience of Jane Langley to the fore and explore how Restorative Practices work best to suit the developmental needs of Early Years students. These two Early Years chapters can be used as a pair to facilitate professional learning.

SECTION 4, containing Chapters 7 to 15, aims to help those responsible for coordinating discipline within a school to build their capacity to embed Restorative Conferencing as an effective and sustainable part of their discipline system. This section is made up of the final nine chapters that give a wealth of practical ideas, processes and examples of formal documentation processes that will act as a springboard to enhance a whole-school system of Restorative Practice. In my experience, implementing a sustainable model of Restorative Practice is one of the biggest challenges that face schools that are inspired by and committed to restorative ideals. Because Restorative Practices rely heavily on dialogue (structured conversations) to address the bulk of behavioural incidents, rather than of a set of predetermined sanctions for identified misbehaviours, a new way of documenting and recording interventions is required. In our current political climate, schools are increasingly required to publicly justify their responses to inappropriate student behaviour and provide evidence of the effectiveness of these responses. Without a solid set of processes supporting 'coal face' restorative approaches, schools will struggle with these ever increasing accountability requirements.

Intellectual Property

Many of the concepts and ideas in this guide have been born from generations of modifications and changes. Restorative Justice is by no-means a new field, however, its application in schools is relatively recent. It is common to see one idea evolve into another as it is adapted to suit different contexts and situations. Wherever possible, the obvious and traceable sources have been acknowledged. If, by chance, an original source has been omitted, I sincerely apologise. The overriding intention in writing this guide is to help my committed and passionate colleagues apply restorative values and approaches to their work to benefit young people in schools.

Use As A Guide Or As A Stand-alone Articles

This guide can be used as a complete package or can be broken into its discrete parts. The chapters in Sections 2, 3 and 4 have been written so they can be used by schools as stand-alone professional readings. Once read by a staff group or a faculty team, these readings can become the centrepiece of professional dialogue, decision-making and even policy development.

Use This Guide In Conjunction With Whole-school Training In Restorative Practices

It is strongly recommended that schools wishing to implement Restorative Practices undertake whole-school training as well as drawing on guides like this one to develop practice. Regrettably, my experience in working with many schools and teachers has led me to believe that Restorative Practices is one of the most misunderstood approaches to school discipline and as a consequence, can be poorly implemented. Because of this, it is important that schools commit to a strategic and holistic approach to learning about Restorative Practices involving hands-on training, professional reading and structured conversations about what working restoratively means for individual teachers, and whole-school practice.

Ideas for formal Restorative Conferencing and the ongoing management of Conference Agreements are presented in detail. Included are examples of proformas schools can use as a springboard to develop their own forms and letters to support their Restorative Discipline processes.

Some Acknowledgements

SECTION 1:
RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS:
AN INTRODUCTION

Working Restoratively

"Repairing harm done to people"

Restorative Practice (sometimes referred to as Restorative Discipline or restorative approaches) is a constructivist learning-based process that plainly distinguishes between 'managing behaviour' and 'managing relationships'. Based on the principles of Restorative Justice, a restorative approach holds that the best way to deal with a problem or incident where people have been harmed and relationships damaged, is to have those involved—the wrongdoers, the harmed and *those in between*—take part in a structured conversation (commonly known as a conference). In this process, those involved are supported to listen, share and exchange ideas and work together toward a resolution that focuses on repairing harm done to people, not simply punishing wrongdoers. A central goal of restorative processes is to strengthen relationships between people, particularly in the wake of incidents where relationships have been strained or fractured by the inevitable bumps and scrapes of school life. Going to work on the quality of relationships between people and dealing with conflict in positive, collaborative ways produce safer school climates.

"Strong and healthy relationships are a protective factor against violence. Weak and fractured relationships are a risk factor for violence."

(Morrison 2007:24)

Restorative Discipline:

- Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community
- Builds systems that address misbehaviour and harm in a way that strengthens relationships
- Focuses on the harm done, rather than only on rule-breaking
- Gives voice to people who have been harmed
- Engages in collaborative problem solving
- Empowers change and growth
- Enhances student responsibility

(Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet 2005: 26–29)