



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity



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BRIEFING
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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN THREE SCOTTISH COUNCILS A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION FUNDED BY THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

**Gwynedd Lloyd, Gillean McCluskey, Joan Stead
University of Edinburgh**

**Sheila Riddell, Elisabet Weedon, Centre for Research in
Education Inclusion and Diversity,
University of Edinburgh
Jean Kane, University of Glasgow**

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Introduction

In 2004 The Scottish Executive established a 30-month pilot project in Restorative Practices (RPs) in three Local Authorities, each of which was funded for about £45,000 annually. The pilot project was later extended until 2008. This briefing outlines the findings of the collaborative evaluation of the implementation over the first two years of RPs in 18 of the pilot schools: one special, seven primary and ten secondary schools. It discusses the wide variety of experiences and approaches associated with RPs in each local area and highlights general factors that may inhibit or facilitate the development and sustainability of RPs in schools.

The evaluation indicates that RPs, as they are developing in the pilot LAs and schools, offer a powerful and effective approach to promoting harmonious relationships in school and to the successful resolution of conflict and harm.

About the evaluation

The overall aim of the pilot projects and the evaluation was to learn more about the development of RPs in Scottish schools, and identify the factors associated with success.

The more specific objectives were:

- To identify the training and support which staff feel is required to enable them to implement the initiatives effectively
- To explore the different situations, contexts and areas of the curriculum where the new approaches are employed
- To analyse the ways in which different participants (school staff, pupils and parents) respond to the innovative approaches and the conditions that appear to produce beneficial outcomes
- To identify the characteristics of schools, staff or others which contribute to positive or negative outcomes
- To identify the support required from local authorities to promote and support school-level implementation

The evaluation report defines the term Restorative Practices, as used in education in Scotland, to mean restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm and developing school ethos, policies and procedures that reduce the possibilities of conflict and harm arising. It is an approach that acknowledges that education is a complex task, with increasing demands on schools in a diverse and changing world where teachers' work can often be challenging and stressful.

Restorative practices aim to:

- Foster positive social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement
- Encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own actions
- Build respect for other people and empathy for their feelings
- Create opportunities for change among staff and pupils.

Practices seen in the pilot schools ranged on a continuum from whole school approaches for all pupils to those used in more challenging situations or with individual students. They included:

- Restorative ethos building
- Curriculum focus on relationship/conflict prevention
- Restorative language and scripts
- Restorative enquiry
- Restorative conversations
- Mediation, shuttle mediation and peer mediation
- Circles - checking in and problem-solving circles
- Restorative meetings, informal conferences, classroom conferences and mini-conferences
- Formal conferences

How did Restorative Practices develop in the pilot schools in Scotland?

Primary and special schools had:

- A strong focus on ethos and relationships in and out of classrooms and a generally broad view of RP underpinning specific practices
- Commitment to the initiative from head teachers and key staff
- Major contributions to the development of the initiative by class teachers and non-teaching support staff
- A focus on promoting restorative language in school interactions, using posters and cards with scripts where appropriate
- Playground projects designed to promote positive relationships through games and activities, facilitated by trained problem solvers and peer mediators
- A focus on restorative conversations and classroom conferences
- Social skills and cognitive reasoning programmes that aimed to prevent and resolve conflict.

RPs were regarded as building on existing practices and current initiatives providing a 'glue' that was helpful in integrating different approaches. There was real evidence of cultural change within the primary and special schools, although there was still a minority of individual resistant staff. There was strong evidence of restorative language and ethos, and the atmosphere in most of the schools became identifiably calmer. Pupils were generally positive about their school experience, feeling that staff were fair and listened to 'both sides of the story'.

Most staff were comfortable with the language of RPs and identified improvements in staff morale. Some schools had raised attainment and in several there was a decrease in exclusions, in-school discipline referrals and out of school referrals. There was clear evidence of children developing conflict resolution skills.

Challenges faced by primary and special schools included:

- Many changes of staff during the pilot (at all levels in many of the schools)
- The continued task of recruiting staff who were sympathetic to RPs, together with the need to keep the momentum for change going
- Difficulties in bringing parents on board and convincing some of the value of the approach
- Developing support structures for the involvement of non-teacher support, such as auxiliaries/ classroom assistants
- Communication with pupils, staff and parents about when a restorative solution had been reached (to avoid 'nothing been seen to be done')
- Emphasising RPs as a means of promoting fairness and justice for all
- Extending RPs to staff relationships as well as pupil relationships

Key staff were aware that they would need to work at sustaining the initiative beyond the pilot project. There was also awareness of the need to sustain and embed RP principles so they were not rejected during episodic 'down' points in the school calendar. Some staff still felt that punishment was a necessary part of their task as teachers. This may indicate that there are different understandings about whether RPs should be seen as the over-arching principle or merely 'another tool in the box'. Senior staff acknowledged that they needed to maintain and develop further training opportunities which allow staff to reflect on the 'big ideas' in RPs, as well as practising the skills.

Secondary schools had more diverse approaches to the development of RPs, most beginning with one part of the school or with pupils with more challenging behaviour. The degree of readiness influenced the approaches initially adopted by schools, for example schools where significant numbers of staff might need further convincing tended to opt for small-scale 'local' innovations to begin with, perhaps involving guidance/behaviour support or particular departments. In other secondary schools, where ethos was regarded as already very positive, aims for RPs were broader and intended to underpin and complement existing practices. It was noted that:

- In several schools staff identified and valued the commitment and modelling of RPs by key members of staff, especially managers and those within pupil support teams
- Some staff and departments were using restorative language and conversations
- Some staff identified significant changes in classroom climate and some subject departments were developing restorative strategies
- Interest in RPs was generated by trained staff working with colleagues, especially with subject departments

- In most secondary schools restorative meetings were used to address conflict between pupils and between staff and pupils
- Several schools were increasing the involvement of pupils as restorative practitioners through buddying and anti-bullying initiatives
- Some schools also developed restorative conferencing processes, where key staff met with a pupil and their family to explore a problem or harm, using a script and formal structure, to allow all concerned to express their views and feelings and to generate a restorative solution

Challenges faced by secondary schools included:

- Revising existing disciplinary policies and procedures to become more restorative
- Offering the opportunity to reflect on values and ethos across the school as well as learning specific practices and skills
- Allowing sufficient time for change to become embedded in school
- Sharing experiences of RPs and providing structured opportunities for in-house training
- Continuing to promote restorative conversations and use of restorative language across the school
- Communicating with staff, pupils and parents about outcomes of restorative interventions and to ensure that RPs are seen as equitable and just by all those concerned.

The communication of ideas and information about RPs is clearly more challenging in secondary schools with large numbers of pupils and, in some schools, physically large buildings.

The evaluation pointed to the importance of effective data systems for monitoring and evaluating RPs and other approaches to discipline and pastoral care. Schools needed to monitor discipline referrals to identify areas of difficulty in the school. There was an awareness of the need to explore with colleagues the role and use of punishment and sanctions. In secondary schools the initial development of RPs was more strongly linked to 'dealing with' discipline issues, and therefore challenged deeply held beliefs around notions of discipline and authority. Responding to this has proved no easy matter, and the key personnel in the pilot schools were impressive in their commitment and enthusiasm.

Did Restorative Practices work?

RPs was one of a number of initiatives taking place in the eighteen schools. This meant that it was difficult to attribute direct effect to a particular strategy. However it seemed important that RPs were compatible with other developments and the willingness to embrace RPs was an indication of a school's openness to change. Primary schools, in particular, were able to develop a 'blended' approach to their various ongoing developments. Table 1 summarises progress across the schools:

Table 1 Achievements of schools by summer 2006

| Schools | Primary and Special | Secondary |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Significant achievement across school | 7 | 2 |
| Significant achievement in places | 1 | 4 |
| Early stages but evidence of progress | 0 | 3 |
| Other priorities dominate | 0 | 1 |

Indicators:**Significant achievement across school**

Clear evidence from research of school change
 Staff mainly positive about RPs
 Most staff and pupils familiar with key ideas
 Evidence of permeation of practice and of positive outcomes
 Evidence of improved relationships within the school
 Pupils indicated that they were listened to
 Integrated policy framework
 Broad focus on values as well as strategies and practices
 Staff reflect on practice
 Clear impact on discipline and school climate

Significant achievement in places

Clear evidence of RPs and developments
 Enthusiasm and understanding by key school staff and in some classrooms and subjects
 Challenge to widen influence of RPs across all classrooms or subjects
 Key staff and some class/subject staff familiar with ideas and reflect on practice
 Some impact on discipline and school climate

Early stages but evidence of progress

Evidence of commitment and enthusiasm by key school staff
 Some staff trained
 Some practices developed in particular settings or by particular staff, eg. behaviour support teachers, or subject teacher in own classroom
 Plans in place for further development
 RPs beginning to impact on discipline and school climate

Other priorities dominate

Other pressures/developments mean that RPs not high priority
 Some staff wish to promote RPs but lack of overall clear plans

Key points from the evaluation:

- Local Authority approaches emphasised staff development and support with local autonomy and flexibility for schools
- Flexibility was seen as a strength, as was the balance of support and accountability
- Effective development of RPs could happen using different approaches - both whole school and more focussed strategies. There was no one model of effective implementation

- Restorative ethos building became increasingly central to school implementation; there was a developing focus on the wellbeing of all pupils through RPs, rather than focusing only on challenging behaviour
- A continuum of RPs was evident in most schools
- Restorative meetings, informal conferences and mini-conferences were common
- Mediation, shuttle mediation and peer mediation were widely developed
- Formal conferencing was not widely used
- Primary schools emphasised whole school, preventive approaches focussing on ethos, language and values in addition to curricular developments and particular practices such as mediation, problem-solving and restorative meetings
- Secondary schools were more likely to begin with one part of the school or with more challenging pupils and to develop restorative meetings and mediation
- However some were developing wider approaches, spreading to subject departments and classrooms and revising their disciplinary and pastoral care processes along restorative lines
- Staff development was central and opportunities for internal and external training were equally important
- Visible support and modelling of a restorative approach by senior managers and key pupil support staff was very important; in the small number of schools where this was less apparent progress was less visible
- Involvement of parents was still quite limited in many schools
- Most energy has gone into developing pupil-focused restorative approaches
- Emphasis on RPs for conflict resolution among staff was generally at a very early stage
- A response or strategy seen by staff as restorative may not always be seen as such by others involved, e.g. pupils
- Funding through the pilot project was seen as important by the schools to support their developments; however there was also evidence of no-cost practice
- There was a clear reduction in the use of disciplinary exclusion in primary schools
- Some secondary schools reduced their use of exclusion
- RPs were implemented successfully in schools with widely differing social profiles, including those with high FME rates

Conclusions

The development of RPs in schools takes time, as the Scottish Executive recognised by extending the period of the pilot projects. Nevertheless the evaluation showed evidence of substantial change in the schools studied, with almost half showing evidence of improved relationships within the school community. Clearly, this progress has to be seen in the context of a whole range of initiatives, practices and developments in these schools during the evaluation period. Indeed one feature of the successful schools was their willingness to reflect on practice and engage with change.

Further information about the project is available from Gillean McCluskey, The Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, EDINBURGH, EH8 8AQ
gillean.mccluskey@ed.ac.uk

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