

RESTORATIVE PRACTICE - HOW YOUNG CAN WE GO?

Streethouse School



Our Restorative Practices Experience

HISTORICAL/GEORAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF STREETHOUSE/WIDER DISTRICT

Streethouse Junior and Infants is a small community school situated within an ex-mining, rural village in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. The children who attend are from the surrounding area that is believed to have a high deprivation level and a history of deep rooted problems with drug and alcohol abuse. The school caters for children from 3 years old up to 11 years old when they transfer to either of two local high schools. After practicing SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) for six years the staff and governors decided to adopt a whole school approach to restorative practice to enhance their existing school practices for behaviour management.

SCHOOLS CHALLENGES

The current number of pupils on roll is 103, 34% of which qualify for free school meals, 85% of pupils are from social housing and currently 32% of children on roll are classed as having special educational needs, which is well above the national figures.

Many of the children who attend Streethouse have behavioural difficulties and the majority of children have very limited life experiences. Approximately 75% of our children entering nursery school at 3 years of age have significant communication and speech problems. Over half of these children are also functioning at well below their expected age and not achieving the milestones of development.

THE CONFERENCE DETAILS AND ITS OUTCOMES

The 'Harm'

Three boys (aged 5 and 6) admitted collecting rocks from the perimeter of the school field and throwing them through the fence at staff cars.

The two members of staff, whose cars were damaged, were very angry. Initial discussions took place with them and myself, (as Head Teacher) as to how to deal with the problem. It was apparent that the feeling was that the boys needed to be made aware that their behaviour had consequences, and exclusion was mentioned several times. However, as a school that had been implementing restorative practices over the last 18 months, staff soon realised that to simply exclude, in this situation, would go against everything we believed in.

The little boys in question at 5 and 6 years, were very immature, and seemed to have little understanding of how their actions had affected those involved; therefore it was decided that to exclude them would no way address their lack of understanding.

It was decided that to hold a restorative conference that included everyone involved; the boys, the staff and their parents, might be the way forward.

I had attended training with the IIRP in restorative conference facilitation the previous year, and whilst our school had utilised many restorative practices such as mini conferences, class conferencing and informal restorative inquiry; along with training of peer mediators, this was to be our first formal restorative conference.

USING THE RESTORATIVE APPROACH

It was felt that we needed to get on and deal with the situation immediately, staff involved were anxious, never having done this before and feared of things not working out as hoped, but we had learned to trust in the process and stick to the script. The parents of the boys were invited in to meet with the Head that afternoon, to be made aware of the situation. Parents expressed their upset about the incident their boys had been involved in and were apologetic. It was explained that as a restorative school we wanted to try and deal with this through using restorative approaches and holding a conference.

Initially the parents were unsure, and felt that maybe the boys were not mature enough at such a young age, to benefit from this approach.

One mother felt that the three boys together would just make each other laugh and not take the situation seriously. Eventually, they all agreed to give it a try, even though one parent was sceptical, and said she wanted exclusion for her son, so that he could be '*taught a lesson*'.

It was suggested that our School Liaison Police Officer (also RP trained) could talk to the whole class of Year 1 children (at their level of understanding), about criminal damage, and with the three boys themselves around the theme of consequences for actions. This talk took place, the day of the conference.

THE CONFERENCE

The nervous parents, staff, myself as facilitator and the boys themselves sat together, facing each other, as I slowly led them all through the restorative script, questions and turn taking format.

The two staff members took turns in explaining how the damage had made them feel. Emotions from anger, to upset, to disappointment were all expressed. One member of staff shared that because it was so near to Christmas, her own children would have to forfeit some presents in order for her to pay for the damage done by the boys to her car.

As she spoke I looked over to the boys and witnessed the realisation of the effects of their actions and remorse beginning to take place, their body language expressed the shame they were now feeling.

Then it was the parents turn to express how they felt, and again, this was very emotional and the boys were subdued and now hanging their heads.

REPAIRING THE HARM

When it came to the part where the boys themselves spoke, they all apologised, without any prompts, and when a member of staff started to cry, the boys seemed visibly affected. Everyone joined in a discussion around sanctions as to how this could be put right. Sanctions from school were explored (such as missing Golden Time and playtime). The parents questioned the boys over what they could do from home. Gentle prompting led to them coming up with home based sanctions such as;

not playing on Play Station, or playing out, and missing their favourite after school clubs.

One parent asked what could be done about the teacher's children missing out on Christmas presents.

The idea of having a special tin placed in school, for all the boys spending and tuck shop money to go into daily was agreed on. This was to go towards the cost of repairing the damaged cars. Staffs were happy with this gesture.

OUTCOMES

Conducting a conference allowed the involvement of parents for the first time, within the conference the children were encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and to realise how their actions had affected those people involved.

After the conference, the parents spoke very positively about the 'Circle', and praised the school for being so supportive and understanding.

The teachers were happy that they had the chance to express how the damage to the cars had made them feel, and felt the issue had been resolved in a meaningful way.

The boys continue to deposit their money faithfully each day in the tin and the parents also volunteered to make contributions to the repair fund.

The rest of their class were very aware of the consequences of such actions and happily, the boys did not miss any days from exclusion or have to carry such a negative reputation of being excluded at such an early stage of their education and formative school years.

THE WIDER BENEFITS OF USING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN STREETHOUSE

- Speaking and listening skills improved across school (Y1-6) from 76% working at age related expectations in Jan 10 to 87% in July 10
- KS1 SATs speaking and listening attainment has improved from 62% Level 2 in 2009 to 91% in 2010, Level 3 from 0% to 27%.
- No exclusions in last 3 academic years.
- Reduction in after lunch behaviour complaints
- Adults calmer when speaking to children.
- Reduction in children being removed from class
- Consistency in approach from all adults in school.
- Complaints from parents regarding bullying much reduced (5 in 2009/10 and 2 so far this academic year)
- Children using adult model to deal with their own disagreements.
- Proved to be an invaluable tool to support us through difficult situations such as the one described above.

IMPACT ON OFSTED INSPECTION

- In 2006-2007 Streethouse was deemed to be a hard to shift school and received a judgement of satisfactory from the OFSTED inspection carried out in September 2007.
- In our 2010 OFSTED inspection we received a judgement of good accompanied by the following comments:-
- "Pupils are courteous, friendly and supportive of others"
- "Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening, they feel well cared for in school and know that there are always trusted adults they can turn to for guidance and support"
- "Their skills at working collaboratively with others are developing well"
- "The learning mentor makes a valuable contribution to the good quality care"
- "The head teacher with her staff has created a positive climate in which pupils can learn and develop well"

In Streethouse School we firmly believe that the use of restorative practice has contributed to this result.

DETAILS OF WAKEFIELD LOCAL AUTHORITY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

In May 2010 Wakefield secured three years independent funding to introduce Restorative Practice in their Schools.

Currently 51 employees in the authority have attended training and 3 High Schools are now using restorative practice along with 1 EBD School, 1 Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit, 1 Key Stage 3 Pupil Referral Unit, and 1 trail blazer Primary School (Streethouse).

In September 2011 a third round of training will begin and to date two more High Schools and one more Primary have already signed up to attend. This is part of the wider strategic plan for developing Restorative Practice within Wakefield.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF USING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

The use of Restorative Practice in our school supports children and families develop self regulating behaviours, self awareness and become empathetic individuals who understand how their actions affect others. This learning has extended into the homes and families of our pupils and has a positive effect on the community at large. This method of working allows us to operate preventatively in partnership with the police in ways that help to reduce anti-social behaviour and work restoratively with parents to support stronger family ties and wider community cohesion.

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May 2011

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