

## **Modelling Key Skills of Global Citizenship through Restorative Practices**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

My aim in this paper is to argue that effective citizenship depends on certain skills, and on the ability to build the kind of relationships we need for society to work well, and that these skills can be learned through the use of Restorative Practice (RP) in schools. As a development educator working with the DICE Project (Development Education and Intercultural Education in ITE for primary teachers), I consider the skills of relationship and of peace-building as basic to effective citizenship, and I believe RP offers a way to learn those everyday skills of citizenship: learning how to be able to interact with others in a respectful way and how to live in diverse communities.

I will first discuss citizenship before explaining briefly what RP is and presenting a framework showing how RP can support the real absorption of citizenship skills. I will finish with a brief look at what is already happening in schools in Ireland and further afield.

### **GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IN EDUCATION**

Schools have a key role in shaping the upcoming generation of citizens, and SPHE in particular aims to help the child “to become an active and responsible citizen” by developing “a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life” (NCCA 1999, pp. 2&9). The introduction to the SPHE Curriculum notes various skills, attitudes and dispositions that will be fostered, including creating and maintaining supportive relationships, good communications skills, care and respect for others, understanding of one’s own feelings and motivations and developing a sense of social responsibility (*ibid.*).

Much of this is echoed by United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI n.d.) which speaks of global citizenship education as “Nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens”. UNESCO (2016, p. 2) develops the understanding of “active” in the context of Global Citizenship Education: “Being a framework for collective action, global citizenship can, and is expected to, generate actions and engagement among, and for, its members through civic actions to promote a better world and future”.

The DICE Project also aims to help teachers to promote and support children in becoming reflective, critical and active citizens, both locally and globally, through the methodologies of Development Education and Intercultural Education.

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship is of course a contested concept; the relevance of notions of citizenship as relating to national borders is being questioned in the face of ethnic or other group tensions within and across borders; and in view of the reality for millions who move across borders and feel they belong in more than one place. Osler (2013), speaking at a conference in Ireland, refers to Kant’s theory of cosmopolitanism, summarising it as a “global vision based on the dignity and inherent rights of individuals as members of a universal humanity” as a basis for an understanding of citizenship.

Citizenship, for the purposes of this paper, encompasses this idea of belonging to a common humanity, of being included and of participating, of recognising the equality and rights of all, of working for a fairer, more equal and democratic society for all, and of solidarity with those whose rights are infringed. In such a view of citizenship, I believe the local and global aspects inform and flow into each other.

## **RESTORATIVE PRACTICE**

Restorative Practice is a set of principles and processes based on an understanding of the importance of positive relationships as central to building and maintaining community. As well as facilitating the building of good relationships, it also encompasses processes that aim to restore relationships when harm has occurred. The Child Development Initiative (CDI) in Tallaght uses this definition: “Restorative Practices (RP) are both a philosophy and a set of skills that have the core aim of building strong relationships and transforming conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner” (CDI 2016).

Restorative Practice developed out of Restorative Justice (RJ), which is a way of dealing with offending or challenging behaviour, and which prioritises repairing harm done to people or relationships over the need to assign blame and impose punishment. It aims to put things right by involving all those impacted by an event or situation in a particular form of process. This can take different forms, but always includes the equal opportunity for each person involved to tell what happened from their perspective without judgement, to consider who has been impacted by the incident and how, and to explore how the harm caused can best be repaired and relationships restored.

### **Restorative Practice in Schools**

RP was first used in schools as a way to deal with difficult behaviour in the school context in a way that would avoid both the exclusion of the harm-doer and leaving the persons harmed feeling angry or resentful – and therefore the school community with unaddressed conflict. Evaluations of initial pilot projects using RJ structures in schools in Australia in the 1990s showed high levels of satisfaction, particularly in terms of the enhancement of positive relationships that developed through the use of these structures, and RJ processes began to be used in schools in several countries. However, a focus on behaviour management is a narrow view of the transformative effect that RP has to offer. RP has developed the RJ processes to include not only a reactive response (ways to restore relationships after they are broken) but a pro-active one which aims first to build community by fostering positive relationships.

RP comprises a language and a set of competencies and processes which are used every day in all school situations. Children learn through this daily modelling, and through using processes in situations in which they are emotionally engaged. This set of skills and practices help cultivate a restorative mindset which informs how we think, speak, listen and approach situations. The following are some examples of these practices:

- children – including disruptive ones – are treated with respect at all times;
- teachers model this respect by using neutral and respectful language, being non-reactive, using affective statements and inviting engagement;
- regular use of circle time, which is already fundamental in SPHE, to check in with children and to address any issues arising in the classroom;

- use of fair process where children can rely on having the opportunity to engage, explain or ask for explanation, where expectations are developed with the children themselves and are clear and fair.

While RP skills and attitudes are learned through the children's own daily experience of restorative language and processes in the school, activities may be used to explore and practise these. As Hopkins (2011, p. 106) points out, "language learners...need practice in listening for understanding and also in speaking to make themselves understood". So restorative teachers may use activities to practice, for example, how to give positive affirmation, or how to use encouraging words and body language as part of active listening, how to express one's needs appropriately in the classroom. Such activities will typically be used as need arises and framed for the needs of the particular class. Opportunities abound in classrooms to stop and explore what speakers need from their listeners, or how one might express feelings appropriately and in non-judgemental language.

### RP AS A SKILLS FRAMEWORK

Belinda Hopkins, long-time UK exponent of circle time and related methodologies, when introduced to RJ and RP, quickly became aware not only of their "contribution to creating more respectful and more caring school communities", but to what she called "their transformative potential.... in help[ing] develop the relationship and citizenship skills of young people" (Hopkins 2006, p.22).

RP begins by modelling the respect that is basic to any understanding of equality, which is a foundational principle of citizenship. From the use and modelling of respectful language and processes, children learn to listen actively, that is, to listen for the feelings and needs behind others' words and so they develop empathy. As everyone is given a chance to share their story, they also develop the ability to get in touch with their own feelings so that these can be expressed in a way that gets heard and understood by others. Emotional literacy - the understanding of feelings, one's own and those of others, and having the appropriate language to express them - is thus learned through daily experience rather than only by devised classroom activities.

Children also develop real skills for dealing with everyday disagreements and conflicts; and in this context of their own experience, they learn that we all tend to see the world from our own perspective; they learn to "suspend the notion that there is only one way of looking at something" and to be able to try to "see through someone else's lens" (Hopkins 2006, p.7). It is in listening to others with respect that children can learn to understand and live with diversity of opinion, not tidying it away, but learning to allow "contending voices to exist" (Davies 2017, pp. 5-6). These are basic skills of citizenship - not just understandings, but concrete skills which can be experienced and practiced in a RP setting. Learning that different perspectives are valid, should be respected and taken into account lays the foundation both for intercultural learning and for the practice of good citizenship.

In a restorative school or classroom, children are encouraged to understand and take responsibility for the impact of their own actions, another key understanding of global citizenship. The Tusla Guidelines for developing a School Code of Behaviour (National Educational Welfare Board 2008) discuss standards of behaviour, positive values such as respect, kindness to others, fairness and so on. They speak of responsibility and the welfare of every student, and even of "helping young people to mature into responsible participating citizens" (p. 28) but when it comes to a student falling short of the expected standards of behaviour, there is no mention of the impacts of their actions or behaviour on others, only of

“measures that may be taken” to punish the offender. They offer a diagram (p. 54) illustrating an appropriate “problem-solving approach” which lacks the key piece of restoring the harm done. It is in considering how the effect of any harm done ripples outwards to include the whole community that the concept of taking responsibility can best be understood.

Many commentators speak of empowerment as a key feature of RP. When children have the opportunity to explore the causes and consequences of their actions, and are supported in finding a restorative way of addressing these through participatory processes where the feelings, needs and opinions of all involved are central, they are empowered as decision-makers and as agents of change; this belief in one’s own agency is key to active and effective citizenship. Empowerment of children has of course implications for the teacher’s understanding of authority and control. Children who are subject to ‘reward’ systems and to punishment, tend to learn compliance rather than develop self-belief.

This sense of agency is an important aspect of global citizenship which looks beyond our own communities to how our lives are connected with and impact on the lives of others around the world. This learning about our interconnected world needs to be grounded in empathy, in appreciation and real respect for diversity, in an ability to approach conflict and to allow difference of opinion to exist, in a belief in one’s own power to act and achieve change. These are the skills which RP can foster, beginning with the personal and interpersonal and laying a foundation for a more global understanding to develop.

### **Teaching restoratively**

The skills of RP are best absorbed when they are modelled, experienced in the making and practiced. The work of psychiatrist Stuart Ablon on Collaborative Problem-Solving is relevant here. Children, he observes, pick up skills like problem-solving and tolerance of frustration at different rates, and those who fail to learn effective use of these skills may ‘behave badly’; but rather than teach these skills in schools, we tend to punish the children who do not have them. Ablon (2014) equates this to the once-normal practice of punishing children who did not read or write correctly. Hopkins (2011, p.162) also discusses the “tendency of teachers to be judgemental about behavioural errors”, as something which “should not happen” and therefore should be punished, while not in fact teaching the requisite skills for more acceptable behaviour. Similarly, children cannot learn the skills of listening to diverse opinions, empathising, problem-solving in conflict if we do not have a way to model and for them to practise them.

Further, Ablon points out that each time a child “misbehaves” in class, there is an opportunity to teach the very skills that child lacks, which can really only be learned in the context where they are needed. Similarly, a restorative classroom presents opportunities on a daily basis through which children can learn experientially and authentically about respectful listening, living with diverse perspectives, problem-solving collaboratively, decision-making; all skills in the building and maintaining of positive relationships and good community.

Many of the values that have been mentioned here are of course already part of everyday life in many schools, which are in the main nurturing and respectful places. However, when rules are broken or an incident occurs, too often it is the old paradigm of blame and punishment that surfaces, as noted in the discussion above of school Codes of Behaviour. There is a lack of coherence here with the stated aims of SPHE. The focus on rules and who has broken them leaves out of the frame the original reason for those rules: that all should be able to live in a safe and just community. For the aims of SPHE to be fully realised, an empowering paradigm is needed throughout school structures and processes. It is this very paradigm shift which opens

the door for ways of thinking about community that are truly inclusive, empathetic, participatory and appreciative of the value of diversity.

### *RP IN SCHOOLS IN IRELAND*

RP is being used in an increasing number of Irish schools, both primary and post-primary. Many teachers are choosing, or being mandated by their schools, to train in RP, and CPD courses in RP are being offered around the country. Where schools have introduced RP it is often as part of a wider community development programme; for example in West Dublin, CDI supports RP across the schools in the area and in the local community. Some schools in that area have been using RP since 2007 as part of this wider RP programme in the community; the principals see multiple benefits for staff and students in the life of the school and the community; and in at least one of these schools, the staff meet together in a community of practice to reflect on their work, and continuous professional development (CPD) is offered regularly (see Stowe 2012). Similarly, other community development organisations in Dublin and around the country are introducing RP in the community as well as in schools.

An evaluation of the CDI programme which introduced RP in schools and across the community in Tallaght, Dublin (Fives, Keenaghan, Canavan, Moran and Coen 2013) showed the potential of RP to engage a range of stakeholders. Primary school teachers noted that staff had adopted “a new, positive and affirmative way of dealing with children in the classroom” (p. 50) and one teacher noticed how a simple change (using 5 positive statements a day) impacts on children’s confidence and self-esteem (p. 39). Participants from a range of organisations found the use of restorative language very effective in working with young people (p. 41). Others noted that:

“RP empowers young people to sort out their own problems, to be part of their own solution, to experiment with questions, and to use these new skills ‘outside’ school. RP has also ‘shown young people skills and qualities they didn’t know they had, their confidence has increased and their opportunities have increased” (*ibid*, p. 41).

The survey also found that “while some school staff were initially resistant to RP..., seeing the positive changes and what one participant identified as ‘the spectacular results which have taken place due to restorative practice’, they now feel that RP is not only beneficial to the children, but it can make the teacher’s job easier.” (p. 44). It was also noted that in some cases children were setting up their own circles in the playground.

Not all schools using restorative approaches have fully trained all their staff and not all use RP as a fully integrated approach throughout the school. Several have introduced some restorative practices and processes but have not (yet at least) espoused the full restorative spectrum. Research evidence shows that RP makes a more sustainable impact where the system of RP is carried through the whole school: where all the staff are trained, and where students find themselves in a consistent atmosphere where their voice is respected. Where a teacher, or a small group of teachers, committed to this way of working are not supported by a congruent system throughout the school, where children can find themselves up against the authoritarian application of rules and punishment, it seems inevitable that the impact will be restricted. An evaluation by McGarrigle, Meade and Morales (2006, p. 14) referred to findings in a 2004 independent report on RJ in schools in the UK which stated that “there was found to be little impact on some outcome measures such as exclusion and no significant improvement in pupil attitudes *except in the small number of schools where a whole school approach had been*

*adopted*” (my emphasis). Buckley and Maxwell (2007, p. 20) found in the New Zealand schools they surveyed that where attempts had been made to combine restorative practices with the more traditional exclusionary processes, this might ‘harm the overall ability of restorative practices to be identified by students as a non-punitive approach to dealing with behaviour issues”.

All evaluations and research into RP in Ireland (e.g. Campbell 2013; Wilson 2011; Stowe [unpublished] 2013) have included recommendations to develop RP further, both in policy statements, and in developing the RP capacity of staff and young people; and anecdotal evidence from those schools which have introduced RP as a whole school approach is almost unreservedly positive about the impact it has had on their students, teachers and wider communities. Similar research findings are seen in Northern Ireland, in the UK generally, US, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and other countries where it has been introduced (e.g. Buckley and Maxwell 2007; Kane *et al.* 2007; McCluskey *et al.* 2008; International Institute for Restorative Practices 2014). Buckley and Maxwell (2007, p. 24) note that some schools in New Zealand have developed a system of internal reviews based on targets they set for themselves. Reviewing their performance by regular surveys of students, staff and families has been useful in helping respond to problems and develop their programmes further.

While most RP training in Ireland takes place as professional development with practising teachers, RP is also now being taught at 3<sup>rd</sup> level; it features to some extent in Initial Teacher Education courses, but it is also the focus of specific RP courses available in several universities and colleges at undergraduate, postgraduate Higher Diploma and Masters in Education level. This should in time increase the level of research on the use and impact of RP in the school context, such evidence having been scarce over recent years. Research evidence on different aspects of school RP programmes and on ways in which approaches may differ across schools would be very welcome.

## CONCLUSION

Essentially RP deepens SPHE by underpinning many of the SPHE aims with daily experience; for example in the *Myself and Others* Strand, to ‘recognise and appreciate differences in people and know how to treat others with dignity and respect’; or ‘know what should be done if one is being bullied’ or ‘explore and practise how to handle conflict without being aggressive’ (Infant curriculum). While these aims are being addressed by many teachers within the SPHE, the constraints of the timetable mean that very little time is available for this work, thus diminishing its importance in favour of literacy, numeracy and other subjects. RP aims to go beyond the circle and take restorative skills into the all the work of the classroom. These skills then in turn give a real grounding for much of the Strand *Myself and the Wider World*. Concepts of democracy and citizenship are taught through the experience of living authentically with others and learning to use appropriate language as well as a range of communication and decision-making skills in real everyday situations. Democracy is no longer something abstract but a real and coherent way of living here and now in the classroom.

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