

Circle of Courage and Restorative Practices: A serendipitous fit

Each young person has four key social and emotional elements that nourish success, survival and growth:

Belonging – *The key element of the Circle of Courage*

Young people need to feel secure in the knowledge that adults in their life accept them for who they are, care about them and want the best for them. A strong sense of belonging leads to thought patterns, or scripts, like 'I fit in' and 'I am loved'.

Every child must attach to caring adults to begin the process of learning and incorporating basic social values. When faced with rejection, children eventually find it hard to reach out to people in ways that result in positive bonding and relationships.

Restorative approaches recognise that only through a firm sense of belonging to a 'community of care' will people choose to avoid behaviours what will harm those connections. When people feel no real belonging to those around them, they have little motivation to protect and nurture these relationships, or take action to repair the relationships if they are damaged either deliberately/consciously or inadvertently.

If harm is caused to people or relationships through thoughtless behaviour or deliberate intent to harm, a restorative approach acknowledges that the individual responsible is at risk of becoming disconnected from their community through the associated feelings of shame inherent in the knowledge that they have caused harm to others. A restorative approach also acknowledges that as a community, we need to work together to repair the harm caused and to reintegrate the young person back into the community of care by bringing them *back into the fold*.

Stigmatising, or labelling students as deviant (inherently bad) holds dire consequences for that student as well as their community.

Mastery – Young people need to feel confident about tackling, and capable of successfully meeting, new challenges and solving important problems. To do this, they need adults in their lives who guide and coach without taking away their responsibility. A strong sense of mastery produces scripts like, 'I can succeed' and 'I am persistent'.

Mastery refers to the social/emotional, academic and physical competence that children and young people need to become capable and responsible citizens. Children with unmet mastery needs may seek to prove their competence in distorted ways or retreat from difficult challenges by giving up. (*Circle of Courage*)

A restorative view sees adults doing things 'with' young people (as opposed to doing things 'to' them, 'for' them, or 'not' doing anything at all). This is a more respectful and empowering model of interaction that guides young people through the many ups and downs of relationships with other adults and peers. Doing things 'with' students, rather than 'for' them, 'to' them, or 'not at all', communicates that we believe they are capable of maintaining, and when required, repairing damaged relationships. Within a restorative framework, adults

facilitate, rather than dominate, discussions around what needs to happen to 'fix things up' when young people inevitably *get it wrong*. Responsibility is placed on students to actively go to work on relationships or repair harm that their behaviour may have caused to others, as opposed to the passive responsibility that are inherent with punitive behaviour management strategies.

As adults, we often complain that students don't take enough responsibility, perhaps we need to ask ourselves how much responsibility we allow them to take, especially when their behaviour has been less than perfect, and things need to be repaired! A restorative approach hands responsibility to young people, embracing authentic communication about how they believe people should treat each other and how this can be achieved.

Independence – young people need to feel they have some power and control over decisions that directly affect them. At the same time, they must be guided and encouraged by supportive adults to take responsibility for their choices and to anticipate consequences wherever they can. A strong sense of independence leads to scripts like, 'I have the power to make decisions' and 'I am in control of myself'.

Children must be secure and guided by caring adults to develop positive autonomy and interdependence and believe they have some power over their world. Where children feel powerless, some will assert themselves in rebellious and aggressive ways, while others will become the pawn of peers and manipulative adults. (*Circle of Courage*)

A key restorative principle says that those most directly impacted by a problem are best placed to come up with solutions to the problem. This positions the role of the adult in quite a different way when addressing conflict and harm among students, from being the one who has to come up with the answers and decide on what needs to happen next to somebody who facilitates discussion between those directly involved, helping them to find a way forward. This again (as mentioned earlier) has adults doing things 'with' students, rather than doing things 'to' them, 'for' them, or doing nothing at all. Within this lies the difference between acting in an authoritarian manner and acting in an authoritative manner with young people. Independence is fostered in students as adults guide and carefully question, instead of coming up with all of the answers and saying to students "this is how it will be!" Mark McCrindle in his research on generation 'Y' tells us that young people nowadays want adults to provide a compass rather than a road map for them.

Generosity – they need to feel part of a community where people care as much about others as they do about themselves. Their ability to empathise with others grows as caring adults encourage them to be of service to others. A strong sense of generosity leads to scripts like, 'I have a purpose in my life' and 'I respect myself and others'. Acts of generosity define the life purpose of human beings. It is at the heart of one's identity. Without opportunities to give to others, some children become involved in pseudo-altruistic helping. Others lead selfish, meaningless lives. (*Circle of Courage*)

Restorative practice does not require forgiveness but rather creates space for it. Forgiveness can be seen as a generous act. When promoting a restorative approach to life we ask ourselves to be generous with our time, and in some situations, with our capacity to engage in the very liberating and empowering act of forgiveness. Conflicts and problems are less often seen as just the business of those directly involved as we, (with permission from those

most readily affected), take the problem to the wider community to ask for understanding, compassion and for their ideas about what might make things better. We ask students to stop saying 'that's their problem and has nothing to do with me ', to 'this is our problem because people are hurting' and our community is under stress. Sharing responsibility in this way asks that students be generous to one another and to listen to each other with empathy and make mutual their feelings. The capacity to do so is the height of generosity.

[Using this reading with colleagues back at your school:](#)

Using professional reading as a catalyst for professional dialogue is an under utilised but extremely powerful process for professional learning enabling schools to move towards a shared understand of key educational concepts.

A process that promotes dialogue amongst colleagues where they share and deepen their understanding of a piece of professional reading is the *final word technique*. People form groups of four and all take the necessary time to read a short article or excerpt of text in silence, highlighting phrases or sentences that really stand out for them.

When the group have all completed reading, they decide who will start the process. The nominated person starts the process by simply pointing out one of their highlighted sections saying something like 'I really found this part interesting because ...' or 'this part really spoke to me because ...'. The other group members then re-read the section that is being referred to. Then, one by one (going around the group in order) the other members make a comment (feedback) to the rest of the group, sharing their opinions about the ideas or topics in that particular part of the text. The person who pointed out that particular part of the text then has the final word on the subjects raised.

This process repeats until all group members have had a turn to identify a significant part of the text for the group to focus upon.

Bill Hansberry and Travis Bartlett