



Restorative Practices in Schools

Definition

Restorative Practices is an umbrella term for services that seek to address harm by restoring the members of a community. This contrasts with most interventions, which focusing on punishing those seen as responsible for harm. The restoration can be preventive, building connections, relationships, and resiliency in a community to both prevent harms and to build resiliency that allows for a faster, easier healing from harm. It can also be responsive, dealing with a specific, targeted harm after the fact by bringing a community together to collaborate in healing.

Origins

The best example of Restorative Practices in action, and the beginning of many modern practices, is the community-based justice of various First Nations peoples around the world. The best-known case is the Māori of New Zealand, who not only preserved their historic processes but succeeded in integrating those practices into the Western-derived social justice system that came later.

Services

By far the best-known and most-used process in Restorative Practices is the Circle. More than just a format for conversation, the Circle as used in Restorative Practices is a complex and characteristic process that begins at the first contact between a community and practitioner and continues long after the formal meeting itself has ended. One technique closely associated with Circles and Restorative Practices in general is the Talking Piece, in which an object moves in a carefully controlled way around a group to help regulate speaking and listening.

Other processes (such as Family Group Conferencing) and blended processes (like Re-Entry and Restorative Discipline) also have their place, but depend in part on Circles and are less common.

Core Values

1. Restoration. The primary aim is to restore and repair harm, caused by intent or by impact, to every member of a community and to the community as a whole.
2. Voluntarism. Each person participates or not of their own free will, and participates at a level of their own comfort and ability.
3. Neutrality. A facilitator's role is not to impose a specific solution, but to aid a community in reaching the outcome that works best for them.
4. Safety. No one should be exposed to harm, or to an unreasonable risk of harm, by the process.
5. Accessibility. Each and every member of a community must be able to participate according to their role, interest, ability, and choice.
6. Respect. The process must uphold the dignity, uniqueness, responsibility, accountability, ability, values, and humanity of every participant.

Suggested Reading

