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I first became involved in restorative practices in 1996 when I was a serving police officer in the UK. Terry O'Connell was invited by our Chief Constable Charles Pollard to share his ideas and conferencing model with us. Les Davey now CEO of IIRP Europe was also part of the team tasked by Charles to develop restorative conferencing in the UK. The Winston Churchill Scholarship that brought Terry to the UK had also taken him to America where he met with Don Nathanson and Ted Wachtel. Thanks to the vision, energy and passion of these people, I take great pride in being able to sit here today as adjunct faculty for the IIRP Graduate School dedicated to furthering our knowledge and understanding of the new social science of restorative practices. I also feel privileged to be able to put this theory into practice as a teacher and special educational needs co-ordinator.

Back in 1996 when I began to think about the ideas that Terry shared with us and how they related to policing, I was strongly influenced by the approach that John Braithwaite took to crime. Rather than asking why people commit crime, John's approach was to look at why most people do the right thing most of the time. His theory of re-integrative shaming separated the act from the actor, the deed from the doer and highlighted the importance of meaningful relationships and community as increasing a person's feelings of attachment and responsibility to those around them. Braithwaite's research supported by Silvan Tomkins' psychological theory of affect highlighted that those who are not integrated into a community or involved in meaningful relationships with others are more likely to commit crime because they do not feel a sense of responsibility to those around them, and they are not constrained by feelings of shame or guilt.

I teach 4-11 year olds (primary school in the UK) and since 2008 when I trained, I have taught exclusively in areas of so called 'high deprivation'. My previous 15 years of experience of restorative principles have underpinned the development of my teaching practice.

We now know that the basic tenets of the restorative philosophy harm and relationships can be applied to any context. Within education any approach to address harm, conflict or inappropriate behaviour is much more likely to be effective if it takes place within the context of meaningful relationships. Young people are also more likely to achieve when they feel connected to their school and the community within that school.

Most recently, especially in my role as special educational needs co-ordinator, it seems to me that developments in educational theory and practice have put far too much emphasis on progress and attainment to the detriment of relationship building. If an analogy was to be made to Braithwaite's approach, education practice is far too focused on why pupils don't achieve rather than being led by the factors that show when and how pupils do engage with learning, make academic progress and achieve in the widest sense. The focus in practice, curriculum design, assessment and inspection has shifted towards deficit, diagnosis and risk factors.

When I arrived at my current school in 2013, 33% of the pupils were on the special educational needs register – that is now 10% and the school is looking at potentially its best academic achievement figures ever. The pupils haven't changed, the parents haven't changed and the area in which they live hasn't changed. What has changed is the climate, culture and leadership within the school and stability in staffing. There is a different approach to identifying and addressing need and to relationship building across the school. Some pupils do have special learning needs, and many experience challenges learning school material or being in a positive emotional state to engage in learning. But does this mean they have disabilities? Can we help pupils and parents without undermining their self-confidence and stigmatizing them with a label? As authors Harry and Klinger suggest, language in itself is not the problem, what is problematic is the belief system that this language represents. I do not deny the need to identify risk factors or the existence of challenging conditions such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder but rather than focusing on these as deficits restorative approaches allow us to identify and address the underlying need without stigmatizing the individual.

Over the last decade there have also seen some exciting developments in neuroscience and education supporting the need to build emotionally healthy communities and helping us to understand why and how restorative approaches work. Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect

highlights the nine innate affects and the blueprint for the healthy expression of emotion including the need to minimise negative affect, maximise positive affect and freely express emotion. Neuroscientists Richard Davidson and Dan Reisel identify through brain imaging research that learning that helps to reduce stress and anxiety reduces the release of the damaging hormone cortisol and improves working memory as well as physical and mental health. When a child's learning is caught up by a distressing emotion then the centres within the brain involved in learning can become hampered and the child's attention can become preoccupied with the source of this negative emotion. Learning difficulties, adversity in home life and disadvantage are all recognised as risk factors that impact on the engagement of young people in their learning.

Social-emotional learning is an empirically verified strategy to improve skills of emotion regulation social functioning and adaptation. Social-emotional learning produces beneficial changes in the brain. Our knowledge of neuroplasticity or the ability for the brain to build or strengthen new connections is now known to continue throughout life not just in childhood and is a far healthier than the administration of drugs. This research has important implications for the development of both proactive and reactive restorative processes and strengthens the psychological framework that already underpins the continuum of formal and informal restorative practices. The creation of a restorative school climate and culture underpinned by proven psychological theory helps develop our ability to manage and express emotions in a way that positively shapes the brain and can lay the foundations for all future learning, emotion regulation and social functioning.

As Ted has highlighted in his paper 'Defining Restorative, "the fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices asserts that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in behavior when those in authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them." If we get the early years right, how to maximise our ability to empathise and reach out to each other, then we will create better, healthier societies and happier communities."

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