

“WORDS ARE LIKE EGGS: WHEN THEY ARE HATCHED, THEY HAVE WINGS” (Atran1)

Promoting a Restorative Society Culture? Some Restorative Learning Tasks emerging from Restorative Practices in Schools and Communities

INTRODUCTION:

In the accompanying text I use the word restorative to mean a practice that is about nurturing, supporting and sustaining new shared relationships and structures, in all aspects of interpersonal and programmatic work. It is not used in a romantic manner, ‘in the sense of restoring some previous golden time’ or in a purely criminal justice (CJ) manner, although it includes such important approaches, when practiced well.

This Restorative Society approach draws on the future oriented definition of restorative offered by Jenkins². Restorative Practices (RP) are explicitly future oriented, and are about working towards a shared, interdependent society, including restorative justice (RJ) work within the criminal justice system, but not limited to it. Such practices in Northern Ireland are to work for something new, something better and healthier for children and young people and families—they are about a movement forward into something completely other than the, sometimes often fractured, and often separate, state of our relationships today.

Restorative Learning Tasks identified in this paper are that we:

1. **That we establish relationships in which ‘different others’ meet together and experience understanding and change between them, building our mutual interdependence. In such a restorative relationship people from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds meet as fellow citizens, not opposed members of different identity groups.**
2. **Give a renewed primacy to the importance of interpersonal, civic and professional relationships that affirm, cradle, nurture and support people, assuring them of their place and dignity.**
3. **Where the victim has agreed to participate, and all parties are open to meeting and volunteer to do so, the option of offering sincere apologies and making reparation may be preferable to a formal justice procedure alone.**
4. **Promote greater public awareness that hurtful and demeaning relationships in daily life cause personal insecurity and thwart personal growth and attainment, with impacts on our health and well-being. Such relationships drain scarce resources and limit imagination and creativity within work groups and in civic and public organisations.**
5. **Promote more restorative relational and institutional cultures that respect and value one another as assets: enhance personal well being; promote civic values of dignity and respect between citizens; and embed restorative procedures that resolve conflicts before they escalate.**
6. **Work towards the future security of states and societies being enhanced by restoring more robust engagements between civil society actors and those elected to political office. There is a restorative society opportunity to establish mutual ways of working and renew structures that offer people with different experiences the opportunity to meet and negotiate their relationships together.**

The main themes in this paper are:

A. The use of the term feral- This is associated with the development of a societal culture where relationships are more liquid and individualism dominates. It is associated with the creation of an underclass and the loss of interdependent feelings with the ‘different other’.

B. The Restorative Challenge-Valuing Relationships

The need to take responsibility for personal and institutional relationships, asserting that we are relational human beings who hurt and love.

C. The Emergence of Three Strands of Restorative Practices, at least:

- **Strand 1 The reactive: attending to the harm done in the vicinity of the criminal justice system.**
e.g. restorative conferencing; diversion; victim offender mediation
- **Strand 2 - The proactive and developmental: promoting relational and organisational cultures in which people move so that the experience of being harmed is less likely.**
e.g. peer mediation; whole organisation/whole school approaches; year/class meetings; circle time
- **Strand 3-The respectful civic and political engagements: restoring strength and vitality to civil society and politics and extending the reach of restorative practices in daily life.**
e.g. rituals of acknowledgement; political and civic meetings; opening up societal silences; civic fora; public meetings

D. The Restorative Confidences we need to develop.

E. Promoting a Restorative Society³ culture?

Promoting a Restorative Society Culture?

The Restorative Tasks emerging from Restorative Practices in Schools and Communities

A. INTRODUCTION: THE USE OF THE TERM ‘FERAL’.

“People are assets not problems, human beings not feral animals”

Many public discussion programmes and articles in tabloids often glibly promote this word “feral” when condemning children, young people and parents whom they see as irresponsible and involved in disruptive behaviour. In ascribing this term to so many fellow human beings, with whom these same speakers often have no contact or understanding relationship at all, such ‘so called’ popular programmes feed a societal scapegoating mechanism, enabling many people to behave as an unthinking mob, that, like all mobs, generate their own unthinking sense of righteousness, their right to see the ‘others’ as useless and of no worth. Society is dead in such a worldview. Any sense of interdepending with one another is driven out.

*A feral child is understood as someone who has lived isolated from human contact from a very young age.
(Oxford reference dictionary)*

The word feral means someone who has been cut off from human relationship and contact.

Is this the substance of the society we want to promote with some children, young people and their families written off, driven out and isolated?

Interestingly Bauman⁴, a critical thinker about how modern western society is developing, suggests that modern day achievers are all being encouraged not to be interdependent citizens but to be individual ‘hunters’, more often than not meeting ‘other hunters’ as lonely, isolated people. For him modern societies are becoming relationally impoverished places⁵ that still desperately need people to take responsibility and make the spaces and places where we live better- to become restorative.

Bauman writes of modern life being characterised by ‘liquid relationships’⁶ where relationships are temporary and people disposable; where others are only useful to us for as long as they enable you and I, if we are ‘hunters’, to bypass them and succeed beyond them. When that happens, we dispose of them.

Bauman also argues that the development of an ‘underclass’ culture, where people are excluded and deemed worthless, is a deep humiliation, denying so many fellow human beings any dignity, value or worth. He argues that this is the first time in modern culture where fellow feelings for the most vulnerable cannot be assumed as a civic value.

*“I read a horrifying account of the new American ghettos as the dumping grounds of unnecessary people and how they become greenhouses of hatred. ...I think we underestimate often the pain of humiliation, being denied the value of your worth and identity, ..(being denied) earning your living and keeping your commitments to your family and neighbours.”*⁷

So, if we hear the word feral used, it may well be a sign of something very unjust happening beneath the surface, and being unmasked. Remember the word scapegoat entered the English language in the 1800’s just as scapegoating -driving others out and taking no responsibility for that act - could no longer be efficiently and silently actioned⁸.

The First Restorative Learning Task is: That we establish relationships in which ‘different others’ meet together and experience understanding and change between them, building our mutual interdependence. In such a restorative relationship people from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds meet as fellow citizens, not opposed members of different identity groups

B. THE RESTORATIVE CHALLENGE -VALUING RELATIONSHIPS ⁹

Drawing on Girard’s mimetic hypothesis¹⁰, we are the products of relationships from the moment of conception. Within the relational history of each one of us there are, hopefully, experiences of being loved and cared for and, probably for most of us, some relationships where we fought for our place too. For some of us there may have been deeply troubling relationships where we have been cut off or rejected and, we too, may have done the same to others. The imprint of these patterns of relationships make us who we are today, with our strengths and possibilities, with our fears and vulnerabilities¹¹.

To be human is to be formed in relationships. To be restorative is to work so that the relationships each of us experience nourish us and grow our abilities to trust and risk. It is to know that the relationships we experience that are demeaning, hurtful and violent can, eventually, be dissolved or cut, losing their power to overwhelm us again.

Without relationships we would not, exist. Some relationships live on in us in a positive manner and can dissolve other relationships that leave us hurt and uneasy. Such ‘freeing’ relationships give us the potential to accept others, to show compassion, to understand, to be patient and even to forgive and start again².

Do relationships really matter, most certainly!

‘The kinds of relationships I have enjoyed until now influence so many of my possibilities or difficulties from now on- relationships do matter!’

- *If you have ever been, or still are, in love!*
- *If you have ever given birth, been present at the birth of your child, been entrusted with the care of a child.*
- *If you have ever stood at the burial of a loved one and been at peace in yourself for all that passed between you or been choked with grief or overcome with regrets at what was never shared between you or what was never healed-you experienced that relationships matter!*
- *If you have ever felt the elation and comfort of being valued by friends at difficult points in life.*
- *If you have ever been hurt and know how that hurt gnaws at you and the people associated with that hurt when you meet them, avoid them or think of them. Of course relationships matter!’*

The Second Restorative Task is:

We need to give a renewed primacy to the importance of interpersonal, civic and professional relationships that affirm, cradle, nurture and support people, assuring them of their place and dignity.

C. THE EMERGENCE OF, AT LEAST, THREE STRANDS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES.

- **The reactive strand: attending to the harm done in the vicinity of the criminal justice system.**
e.g. restorative conferencing; diversion; victim offender mediation
- **The proactive and developmental strand: promoting relational and organisational cultures in which people move, so that the experience of being harmed is less likely.**
e.g. peer mediation; whole organization/whole school approaches; year/class meetings; circle time
- **The respectful civic and political engagement strand: restoring strength and vitality to civil society and politics and extending the reach of restorative practices in daily life.**
e.g. rituals of acknowledgement; political and civic meetings; opening up societal silences; civic fora; public meetings

STRAND 1: THE REACTIVE STRAND: Restorative Conferencing; Diversion; Victim Offender Mediation associated with the Criminal Justice (CJ) System

This practice comes from a criminal justice background with restorative justice practice and its emphasis on holding people to account for the harm they have done. Where possible, this practice seeks to build a renewed sense of community where victims are not fearful, feel safer and where offenders make reparation and continue to be held by a community of care that demands, and expects, them to change. It is often practiced through good youth diversion programmes, court led initiatives and, in Northern Ireland, with all young people who acknowledge their guilt within the Youth Justice System¹³.

Emerging evidence from diverse jurisdictions points to the effectiveness of Restorative Conferencing being greater, the more serious the crime or offence. There are a number of such programmes being developed and researched in diverse jurisdictions. e.g. In New Zealand with the Parole Board; in Australia with Prison Staff restorative facilitation for long sentence, high tariff cases.

The research suggests that this works best when the victim has initiated the process and they have to be the arbiter on whether or not the process moves. Many victims, who wish this, speak of feelings of greater safety and ease as a result. This knowledge means that the experience accumulated with some young people is always important. Additionally as practitioners seek to promote this practice with more serious, higher tariff breaches, considerable advocacy effort and additional preparation time is required. Sometimes this need for time is not given and the expected results are limited. In such cases the wider public can become too readily disappointed.

Does It Work?

Joanna Shapland's Random Control Test (RCT) study¹⁴ of people being assigned a restorative conference after conviction, if the victim was open to it in London Courts, was so compelling that Joanna has said she will no longer do any similar RCT research, because the evidence in favour of those conferenced was so compelling.

In a study of RJ Conferencing Strang et al¹⁵

This long programme of research has yielded some rigorous findings about the effects and effectiveness of RJ conferencing.

In brief: RJ is usually more effective than prosecution through the courts in reducing reoffending

- most victims who decide to participate in RJ conferences are satisfied with their experience and are glad that they did so.
- Most victims, especially women, who experience post-traumatic stress as a result of the crime, recover more quickly if they meet their offenders in RJ conferences
- both victims and offenders usually feel that RJ conferencing is a fairer process than court
- RJ is more cost-effective than court when costs associated with the criminal justice process and material harm to victims is taken into account.

In Sherman and Strang's study¹⁶ across a variety of jurisdictions, RJ, compared to traditional justice methods:

- substantially reduced repeat offending for some offenders, but not all;
- doubled (or more) the offences brought to justice as a diversion from CJ;
- reduced crime victims' post-traumatic stress symptoms and related costs;
- provided both victims and offenders with more satisfaction with justice than CJ;
- reduced crime victims' desire for violent revenge against their offenders;
- reduced the costs of criminal justice, when used as diversion from CJ;
- reduced recidivism more than prison (adults) or as well as prison (youths).

In Property crimes

Five tests of RJ have found reductions in recidivism after property crime.

Victim benefits

Two RCTs in London show that RJ reduces post-traumatic stress;
In four RCTs RJ reduces the desire for violent revenge;
in four RCTs victims prefer RJ over CJ.

Gabrielle Maxwell, in discussion with the author, speaking about her study¹⁷ of Restorative Conferences three years after the conference, found a considerable footprint and legacy in terms of: the reparative actions being acted on; victim satisfaction and feelings of safety being high; and changes in the lives of the young people being substantial and maintained.

Where the restorative meeting is well prepared and facilitated; where the professionals work interdependently and do not overwhelm it; and where all the family and supporters attend on a voluntary basis; the research evidence is that it does work effectively and where reparation is made, and honoured, the legacy of the conferences lasts beyond three years in terms of offender behaviour.

The Third Restorative Learning Task is: Where the victim has agreed to participate, and all parties are open to meeting and volunteer to do so, the option of offering sincere apologies and making reparation may be preferable to a formal justice procedure alone.

STRAND 2. PROACTIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

This strand of practice comes from an educational practice where restorative is understood as meaning “restoring right relationships, bringing new strength or vigour” (Jenkins, Endnote 2).

It is about creating more open relational ways between different people in public and civic institutions and attending to the cultures and practices of those organizations and institutions.

Zehr (in Weitekamp)¹⁸ states three central themes of the restorative process with victims are characterised by the movement from:

- disorder to order;
- disconnected relationships to a sense of connectedness;
- disempowered voice to empowered voice.

If we apply these practices to day to day life together in spaces such as: a school community; in our families; in a ‘cared for’ children’s unit; in a mental health or youth project; a faith centre; a trade union group; or in the day of a tutor who has felt vulnerable or uncertain about working with children and young people who challenge them; the restorative task then is about:

- building, or re-building, a sense of relatedness between people who share a space or a place or a society together;
- enabling the voices of all to be heard, especially those who have been demeaned or put down, ‘shushed’, ‘denied’ or locked out;
- bringing people into a new order or structure where they feel safe, where the talents of all are pooled, where our vulnerability is held and where our talents and gifts are released;
- speaking and working with people in an open and non-judgemental manner (e.g. using a narrative discourse approach (Drewery¹⁹).

Underpinning Values

For me, our restorative style is to be marked out by working to values such as equity, diversity and interdependence²⁰ in the relational ways we safeguard our class or learning group or children’s unit or group, and in the ways such values underpin the culture of our organisational structures. A restorative style is promoted when we ensure that the boundaries of the group are fair and open-when all are treated according to need (equity); when all are valued as being different (diversity) and, when we really do our work well, all experience belonging and that ‘zing’ of learning and working together (interdependence).

Does It Work?

There is an accumulating base of research evidence from the Republic of Ireland²¹. There are also some projects in Northern Ireland that would be enhanced with longitudinal research approaches.

In Scotland²², there have been a number of longitudinal studies developed that show a definite increase in school safety, school culture, ways of relationally dealing with conflict, reduced suspension rates and increased pupil attainment. In England there are a number of major developments, too numerous to do all credit. Some examples are the major turning round of a Middlesbrough Second Level School; the work in Norfolk at Secondary level as well as with parents and inter professional teams. The developments in Lancashire, especially that of Shares, Skelmersdale²³ and Burnley, where a number of primary schools, some previously designated as failing, have now, through a restorative practices consortium:

- developed a town cluster of schools with restorative cultures at their centre;
- raised all levels of school performance and pupil attainment in one of the most depressed areas;
- are now moving to an agreed ‘no exclusion policy’ across all schools.

The attainment levels of children have all been raised and a large number of these schools are now deemed ‘excellent’ or awarded ‘outstanding with excellent features’ (<http://shareslancashire.co.uk>). Hopkins has both developed and collated some very strong restorative youth programmes and children’s unit practices of an excellent restorative practice nature (see link below).

The work of Drewery, Kecskemeti, Kaveney and Gray²⁴, and others, in a number of large and diverse primary and secondary schools in New Zealand are excellent models and there are many others in diverse European countries²⁵, Australia (Blood, Thorsborne²⁶), Canada (Morrison), the United States (Reistenberg) and South Africa (Lephalala), all edited by Sellman, Cremin, Mc Cluskey²⁷

The major and sustained restorative developments, where school culture has become rich and open and where school safety has increased and school attainment increased across all categories, has always been accompanied by whole school commitments by senior managers and governors. Where that has been accompanied by trusting, and working with, the parents, children and young people as partners in this enterprise, the reach has been so much deeper.

Finally, where peer mediation and restorative skills have been developed with young primary children upwards, they have shown an ability to absorb the practices and refine them in their own ways but, more importantly, peer mediation becomes an inter generational learning project where, as pupils move through the life course:

- they take it back home;
- they take it into their next schools; and
- they will take it into their own families as parents, when they reach that stage.

Rowan Williams²⁸ argues for a justice system based on responsibility for one another (interdependence) not just one based on obligations and rights. It is important that whole school restorative cultures are being developed because such school cultures signal the importance of such approaches having a validity for the wider society. Such approaches go beyond the use of restorative justice with young juvenile offenders, demonstrating the validity of restorative ways to whole communities of diverse people and backgrounds. The language of inter-depending then grows among a body of children, young people and the teaching staff and parents / carers associated with a school.

The Fourth Restorative Learning Task is: Promote greater public awareness that hurtful and demeaning relationships in daily life cause personal insecurity and thwart personal growth and attainment, with impacts on our health and well-being. Such relationships drain scarce resources and limit imagination and creativity within work groups and in civic and public organisations.

(See Endnote 3: Christie, Fattah, Johnstone, Shapland, Strang & Braithwaite, Maxwell & Lui, Wilson, Wright)

STRAND 3. RESPECTFUL CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT RESTORING CITIZENSHIP

The restorative task is about re-energizing citizenship.

In this time of economic stringency it is important “not to shy away from the politics of citizenship and the conditions in which we are expected to act (together) as citizens”²⁹. One restorative task is to build new and relevant understandings of being citizens. It is not to give into the impulses of exclusion and the seduction of partisan identities, turning away from being fellow citizens with those different to us, socially, culturally and economically. The restorative task is to find common cause, and interdependence, with those we share different places with.

Citizenship is about thinking together about re-inventing politics, a process that has to be ‘cared for and cultivated in company with others’³⁰. To be a modern citizen is to engage with other citizens and, with political representatives, about the relationship between ‘means and ends’.

“Without this constant and continuous re-invention of the political, societies become morally bankrupt. It is essential for the health of democracy that the educational space for this (restorative and) creative, democratic work be cherished and expanded”³¹.

To act restoratively must be an all age experience-not just tricks for children at school.

The need for citizenship education for children and young people needs couched within a wider inter- generational commitment to see one another as equal citizens of one place -not separating the deserving from the undeserving; or the capable from the incapable; or the well to do from the poor. It is also to look again at the limits of ‘narrow nationalisms’ in an international age and encourage people to strive to become ‘international citizens’ (see Shami Chakrabati, Prospect, 2012).

Building a restorative culture in society is:

RELATIONALLY

To see one another as potential assets and gifts to society;

To enable people to transgress established boundaries of class, identity and ability and meet together.

ORGANISATIONALLY

To build a new practice that works critically and reflectively within existing institutions;

To create new, or enliven old, institutions that have inclusion, possibility and hope at their centre;

To support existing organisations re-envision their role in the light of a new restorative vision.

To set free initiatives that are transformative.

INTERNATIONALLY

The invitation is to lift our eyes to the reality of being citizens of a deeply interconnected world.

In Northern Ireland, at many different times, and within different identity traditions, people and the leadership of political and religious identity traditions have often, explicitly and implicitly, associated themselves with narrow ethnocentric positions, often accompanied by a deeply ambivalent stance on violence. Such an ethnocentric culture is not conducive to preparing children, young people and adults to take their place in a diverse and mobile world.

The fifth Restorative Task is: Promote more restorative relational and institutional cultures that respect and value one another as assets; enhance personal well being; promote civic values of dignity and respect between citizens; and embed restorative procedures that resolve conflicts before they escalate.

D. THE RESTORATIVE CONFIDENCES WE NEED TO DEVELOP

Building trust through relationships and structures where people have their place secured is a restorative challenge.

Quality relationships are essential to our human growth and possibilities. Any community educator, formal or informal; any teacher or tutor, any organisational learning or training officer, needs to acknowledge the relational dimension of learning and create a quality relationship base for her/his work.

To make relationships freely and responsibly, to cross lines of difference with greater ease, to be open to others regardless of their identity, are all gifts that each person needs in the modern world. Open and trusting relationships are at the heart of daily well-being that human beings continually need with others. To hear other experiences, to build understanding, to develop shared respect and shared values are key experiences in creating and sustaining fair and open societies. Such societies continually work to lessen inequality and address access and opportunity, such societies seek to restore, enable and heal³².

Laying foundations for a more restorative culture in society

Right relations between different people are platforms on which to build commitment cultures around ‘right and just relations’ between people of different religious beliefs, political opinions and diverse origins³³. This is possible only on the base of equality and fundamental human rights.

Where right relations are experienced relationally in groups, clubs, sports, schools, youth centres, faith communities, civic organisations, music, cultural and artistic groups people grow tall and know, in their being, something about the need for dignity between people.

Restorative learning supports citizens become more at ease with different others and gain more experience and understanding of the ways through which trust can be developed and the power of individual human agency amplified. Such experiential learning builds confidence and possibilities in trusting, and being trusted by, the different other. It interconnects previously estranged people.

The Sixth Restorative Task is: To work towards the future security of states and societies being enhanced by restoring more robust and respectful engagements between civil society actors and those elected to political office. There is a restorative society opportunity to establish mutual ways of working and renew structures that offer people with different experiences the opportunity to meet and negotiate their relationships together.

E. PROMOTING A RESTORATIVE SOCIETY CULTURE**Does It Work?**

As long as restorative justice ideas have remained primarily associated with those accused of crime alone, and those who are poor and vulnerable, wider society has often embraced it. When it is suggested that it is not just a case of whether those who do violence are fit to come back into the community, but whether the community is fit to welcome back some of its citizens, the response is less welcoming.

To turn our collective faces forward and work to change the culture of all our public and civic institutions to be more open to receiving everyone, and being open to resolving difficulties in a restorative manner, is the least developed aspect of the restorative agenda. Such actions are about creating a restorative society culture.

When you look at the reactive strands from criminal justice and the developmental strands in developing relational and institutional cultures that build capacity to resolve difficulties, such strands would be easier if they were swimming in a wider societal culture that was open to restorative ways and that, especially, wished our children and young people to grow up with more social skills, at ease with different others, safe, and confident that they were well able to anticipate conflict and resolve it.

Recently, in the work of long established restorative practitioners, this wider societal task is coming to the fore from New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Canada, Belgium, Holland, Hungary, Finland, Brazil and the United States (see Endnote 3 links to: Maxwell & Lui, Morrison, Wright, Strang and Braithwaite, Johnstone, Fattah, Christie).

It is now time that this work is moved beyond the narrow domains of criminal justice alone and the best practice models associated with it promoted within the centre of societies-in the ways citizens live together; in the working practices and cultures of civic and public institutions; and, potentially, in the mainstream practice of elected representatives.

The best practices associated with some RJ initiatives are important because of:

1. the values driven nature of these ways that embed humility, respect³⁴ and non-violence.
2. the models of inclusion and engagement developed between people normally not meeting;
3. the potential healthy relationships and societal well being that emerge from these engagements;
4. the potential to develop a critical mass of citizens and groups embracing a restorative way³⁵.

We now need an explicit Restorative Society practice developed in the relational and structural culture of citizens and in public, civic and faith based organisations that dissolves the ways that separate, and embeds the ways of trust and new relationships with the different other.

Such practices would:

- **Dissolve the lasting legacy of fear**, shaped by antagonism, violence and insecurity in daily relationships;
- Address the dynamics of separation, avoidance and politeness that maintain a **distrust of different others**;
- **Promote** meeting together and building trust;
- **Challenge our ambivalence to violence** where “our violence is justified, your violence is unacceptable”.
- **Promote an openness to trust or see the different other as a gift.**

To promote a ‘restorative society culture’ is to promote principles, values and ways of working that nourish the core ways society works.

In the post agreement society of NI, still even after 18 years, there is a need to develop and embed new events that, repeated and patterned, become established structures³⁶, new ways of being together with one another, ways that embed trust, ways of making a new future together imaginable.

There is a need to develop structures between different citizens that move people forward, finding ways to acknowledge wider societal hurts, acknowledge victims and address sensitive topics associated with the past³⁷. In terms of younger generations, there is a need to model and multiply relationships between ‘different others’ being entered into hopefully, creating new energies and establishing new or renewed structures and cultures (Jenkins, 2006, 153) in civic and public engagements. RJ practice at its best should infuse this practice and inform the wider public and civil society culture.

Within the Restorative Practices team at Ulster University, we have increasingly worked within this wider landscape to promote a restorative society culture. We have developed deep learning processes whereby diverse practitioners, and their very different civic and public agencies, have been, and currently are, invited to critically and explicitly examine the extent to which these concepts are wholeheartedly embraced and used or whether practitioners and their agencies are less than diligent in drawing on them!

The restorative society challenge, for us, thus becomes:

- To explore how we might align societal practices with a culture that is restorative in intent.
- To promote a societal understanding that when harm is done, it is not only done to individuals but to the relationships and structures all are part of.
- To embed the core restorative values, principles and institutional practices that serve wider society, not just to the individuals involved.

This ‘future oriented’ restorative task, is relevant to both ‘post conflict’ and ‘more secure’ societies facing the challenges of inter-culturalism, rising identity politics and the challenging of established justice systems. It is to promote a societal culture that is committed to heal relationships and promote alternatives to being violent with one another (Johnstone).

Our understanding is that peace is primarily characterised by ‘the presence of new relationships and structures’ not just ‘the absence of violence’.

To return to the quotation at the beginning of this paper, *the Madagascan proverb*, “Words are like eggs: When they are hatched, they have wings. Restorative practice, over many years, has been incubating relationships and structures of healing, hope and possibilities where once they did not exist or were only known about by a few citizens, mainly victims and survivors, who took risks. These experiences and the relationships and structures that made them possible, are the very words and structures that can soar above pessimism and disbelief. Such restorative learning practices need fashioned and honed with discipline and diligence.

It is important that these restorative relationships and structures are now used in the practical task of promoting a more open Restorative Society agenda, restoring equity, promoting more inclusive institutional cultures and relationships where all people are welcomed and enabled to mix and move more freely, at ease with different others.

This text is a development from one prepared in 2012, and draws on experience and research since then with former colleagues Hugh Campbell and Tim Chapman, Ulster University and as a research member with the ALTERNATIVE European Union Framework 7 Research Programme, 2012-16. <http://www.alternativeproject.eu>

Endnotes

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The Understanding Conflict Trust (UCT) grew out of the work of The Corrymeela Community in 1987 (www.corrymeela.org).

The charitable purpose of UCT is:

The advancement of Education, in particular, to promote the understanding of conflict in the community.

Our work gathers around:

Pursuing: “the study of the role of traditions in community conflict and the place of tradition in the development of reconciliation in the community.”

Developing: “the exercise and development of a training, supervisory and consultative relationship with community and professional groups”

Publishing: “the authorship, publication and distribution of materials, videos films, papers, books and other documentation... in compliance with the objects.”

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