

Experiences of restorative justice in settings with children and young people: The accounts of professionals and young people.

Paper 1: Examining the views of restorative practitioners about the effects of their professional practices.

Paper 2: Examining the views of young people about their experiences of restorative justice-based practices.

Submitted by Duncan Edward Gillard to the University of Exeter
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Signature:

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Paper 1:

Examining the views of restorative practitioners about the effects of their professional practices.

Abstract

The Youth Justice Board and the Department for Education share the common goal of reducing offending and harmful behaviour in children and young people (Ministry of Justice, 2010; DfE, 2011). In both sectors, evidence for the effectiveness of practices based upon the principles of restorative justice (RJ) is mounting, yet there is a distinct lack of theoretical clarity regarding the psychological mechanisms through which such practices work. Moreover, the voice of RJ practitioners is not found in current theoretical propositions. In this paper, eight RJ practitioners, from a mixture of school and youth justice backgrounds, are interviewed about their professional practices. Interview transcripts are thematically analysed in an inductive manner, according to the guidelines set out by Braun & Clarke (2006). Analysis is interpreted in terms of responsive regulation (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2003), the social learning perspective of Macready (2009) and in terms of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). It is suggested that RJ-based practices, according to the views of professionals, are effective because a) they respond to harm flexibly and after the incident, b) they engage young people in a process of learning social responsibility and c) they provide young people with ways of reducing cognitive dissonance based upon acknowledging and repairing harm, rather than through blaming and denying responsibility.

Paper 2:

Examining the views of young people about their experiences of restorative justice-based practices.

Abstract

The Youth Justice Board and the Department for Education share the common goal of reducing offending and harmful behaviour in children and young people (Ministry of Justice, 2010; DfE, 2011). In both sectors, evidence for the effectiveness of practices based upon the principles of restorative justice (RJ) is mounting, yet there is a distinct lack of theoretical clarity regarding the psychological mechanisms through which such practices work. Whilst the voice of young people can be heard in the literature, these have come primarily through surveys and other closed-question response formats. Thus, there is a lack of an in-depth characterisation of young people's experiences of RJ. In this paper, six young people are interviewed about their experiences of RJ-based practices. Interview transcripts are thematically analysed in an inductive manner, according to the guidelines set out by Braun & Clarke (2006). Analysis is interpreted in terms of Barton's (2000) Empowerment Model of Restorative Justice (EMRJ) and in terms of responsive regulation (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2003). It is suggested that RJ-based practices, according to the views of young people, are effective because a) they empower young people in the process of responding to harm and b) they involve responding to harm flexibly and after the incident, providing emotional support and enabling all stakeholders to be open and honest. The implications of both these findings and those from paper 1 are discussed in the context of Aug 2011 riots.

