Modelling Key Skills of Global Citizenship through Restorative Practices

My aim in this paper is to argue that effective citizenship depends on certain skills, and on the ability to build the kind of relationships we need for society to work well, and for good intentions to translate into good outcomes, and that these skills can be learned through the use of Restorative Practices (RPs) in schools. As a development educator, I've see the skills of relationship and of peace-building as basic to effective citizenship. And in my work as mediator and restorative practitioner, I see first-hand the very powerful effect of restorative processes. RPs offer a way to learn those everyday skills of citizenship: learning how to live in diverse communities and how to be able to interact with others in a respectful way.

I'd like to begin by discussing citizenship briefly; then I'll talk through RJ and RP and look at how I think the framework RP offers can support the real absorption of citizenship skills. And I'll finish with a brief look at what is already happening in Irish schools. The DICE Project works with student primary teachers, and thus I have mainly primary schools in mind, but it applies equally to post-primary situations, and many secondary schools are already using RP structures.

Global Citizenship in Education

Schools have a key role in shaping the upcoming generation of citizens, and SPHE in particular aims to help the child 'to become an active and responsible citizen' by developing 'a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life' (NCCA 1999 pp2&9). The introduction to the SPHE Curriculum spells out the skills, attitudes and dispositions that will be fostered: creating and maintaining supportive relationships, good communications skills, care and respect for others, understanding of one's own feelings and motivations and developing a sense of social responsibility.

Much of this is echoed by UNESCO which speaks of global citizenship education as 'Nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens'. It then expands its understanding of 'active': 'Being a framework for collective action, global citizenship can, and is expected to, generate actions and engagement among, and for, its members through civic actions to promote a better world and future' (UNESCO 2016)

The DICE Project also aims to help teachers to promote and support children in becoming reflective, critical and active citizens, both locally and globally, through the methodologies of Development Education.

Citizenship is of course a contested concept, with the relevance of notions of citizenship as relating to national borders being questioned in the face of ethnic or other group tensions within and across borders; and of the reality for millions who move across borders and feel they belong in more than one place. (Osler 2014). Osler looks to Kant's description of cosmopolitanism as a 'global vision based on the dignity and inherent rights of individuals as members of a universal humanity' and to Mary Kaldor's ideal of 'an assumption of human equality and….a celebration of diversity' as a basis for an understanding of citizenship.

Citizenship, for the purposes of this paper, encompasses this idea of belonging to a common humanity, of being included and of participating, of recognising the equality and rights of all, of working for a fairer, more equal and democratic society for all, and of solidarity with those whose rights are infringed. In such a view of citizenship, I believe the local and global aspects inform and flow into each other.

Restorative Practices and Restorative Justice

Restorative Practices are a set of principles and processes based on an understanding of the importance of positive relationships as central to building and maintaining community, and they involve processes that aim to restore relationships when harm has occurred. The Child Development Initiative in Tallaght uses this definition: 'Restorative Practices (RP) are both a philosophy and a set of skills that have the core aim of building strong relationships and transforming conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner.' (TWCDI 2016)

Restorative Practices developed out of Restorative Justice (RJ), which is a way of dealing with offending or challenging behaviour, and which prioritises repairing harm done to people or relationships over the need to assign blame and impose punishment. It aims to 'put things right' by involving all those impacted by an event or situation in a particular form of process. This can take different forms, but always includes these elements:

- the opportunity for wrong-doer to tell what happened and to explain their actions without judgement
- the equal opportunity for those impacted by the wrong-doing to speak about what happened and how they felt - and are feeling - about it;
- the opportunity for the wrong-doer to take responsibility and to apologise
- a collaborative effort to decide on the best way forward - to repair the harm done and restore both relationships and the wrong-doer's position in the community.

RJ processes are increasingly used in many countries to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour. Its origins are mostly in indigenous forms of justice, mostly commonly ascribed to the Maoris and some Native American traditions. In the New Zealand justice system, all cases of young offending except cases of violence go to RJ circles. It is also an underlying thread in the Brehon Laws of Ireland, where it was understood that to punish someone by imprisonment or some form of physical chastisement was of no use if the 'victim' of the wrong-doing had been left without her herd of cows, or best workman. Repairing the harm by restoration was what was required for the community to continue to function successfully. Rules and sanctions may have their place, but the focus on rules and who has broken them leaves out of the frame the original reason for those rules: that all should be able to live in a safe and just community. Focusing on the harm done brings back into perspective the impacts of rule breaking, and allows for the reparation of those impacts and the restoration of relationships, rather than only the punishment of the wrong-doer.

Whether we are talking about RJ in the criminal justice system or with RPs in schools and communities, experience shows that the resistance to letting go of the need to punish the offender presents the biggest obstacle to the adoption of RJ principles; this was also my own experience in teaching young Criminology students about RJ: that an offender would have the opportunity to speak for her- or him-self went against all their learned conceptions of 'justice'. But it is this very paradigm shift that opens the door for ways of thinking about community that are more inclusive, empathetic, participatory and appreciative of the value of difference – in line with the thinking above about citizenship. RJ moves from thinking of the past to considering the future, from establishing guilt and blame to defining needs and obligations, from punishment to accountability and reparation of harm, with the ultimate focus on the well-being of the whole community.

This shift from focusing on the blame and punishment of the offender, where those harmed/impacted are largely ignored, allows the wrong-doer to focus on others instead of self; to consider the impacts of her/his actions instead of looking for justifications for them and blaming others; to recognise the extent of the harm caused and becoming accountable, instead of feeling victimised by the system; and from being ostracised to being integrated back into the community as s/he is included in the process of creating a way forward.

Restorative Practices in Schools

RPs were first introduced in schools as RJ, dealing with situations of harm or conflict. But they have expanded this understanding of RJ to include not only a reactive process – ways to restore relationships after they are broken, but a pro-active one by developing practices which build healthy relationships through learning and using the skills of active listening, empathy, expressing feelings appropriately, respecting other perspectives and collaborating to create useful solutions.

RPs comprise a language and a set of competencies and processes which are used every day in all school situations. Children learn through this daily modelling, and through using the processes in situations in which they are emotionally engaged. Therefore they are learning through their own experience, and not through exercises or activities designed to 'teach' these skills.

Essentially then RPs deepen SPHE – they underpin many of the aims, for example in the Myself and Others Strand, to 'recognise and appreciate differences in people and know how to treat others with dignity and respect'; or 'know what should be done if one is being bullied' or 'explore and practise how to handle conflict without being aggressive' (Infant curriculum). These skills then in turn give real substance to much of the Strand Myself and the Wider World – concepts of democracy and citizenship are taught through the experience of living authentically with others and learning to use appropriate language as well as a range of communication and decision-making skills in real everyday situations. Democracy is no longer something abstract but a real and coherent way of living here in the classroom.

Belinda Hopkins, long-time UK exponent of circle time and related methodologies, when introduced to RJ and RPs, quickly became aware not only of their 'contribution to creating more respectful and more caring school communities, but to what she called 'their transformative potential…. in help[ing] develop the relationship and citizenship skills of young people' (Hopkins 2006). I'd like to explore a few of those skills and concepts:

1. RPs model the respect that is basic to any understanding of equality, which is, in its turn, a basic principle of citizenship. These practices give children real skills for dealing with everyday disagreements and conflicts and underlying the development of those skills is a learning about how perspectives are different. The restorative questions (See Appendix) used in addressing unacceptable behaviour show how any situation or incident can and will be seen in different ways by those involved. It can happen that in working through these questions it becomes clear that the wrong-doer had also experienced harm – the terms wrong-doer and person harmed refer only to the incident in question, but the context may open up more complex interactions. This doesn't excuse the wrong-doer in the case under review, but it opens up understanding of motivations – the child who bullies because they were bullied; the child who acts out of an experience of exclusion and so on.

2. Through these restorative questions children learn that people see the world from their own perspective, they learn to 'suspend the notion that there is only one way of looking at something' (Hopkins 2006), and to be able to try to 'see through someone else's lens'. These are basic skills of citizenship – not just understandings, but concrete skills which can be experienced and practiced in a RP setting. Learning that different perspectives are valid and should be respected and taken into account lays the foundation both for intercultural learning and for the practice of good citizenship.

3. Understanding and taking responsibility for the impact of one's own actions is another key understanding of global citizenship. It is useful in this context to consider the Tusla Guidelines for developing a School Code of Behaviour (NEWB 2008). The Guidelines discuss standards of behaviour, positive values such as respect, kindness to others, fairness and so on. They speak of responsibility and the welfare of every student, and even of 'helping young people to

mature into responsible participating citizens (p28) but when it comes to a student falling short of the expected standards of behaviour, there is no mention of the impacts of their actions or behavior on others, only of 'measures that may be taken' to punish the offender. They offer a diagram (p54) illustrating an appropriate 'problem-solving approach' which very positive in many ways, but lacks the key piece of restoring the harm done. It is in considering how the effect of any harm done ripples outwards to include the whole community that the concept of 'taking responsibility' can best be understood.

4. It is in listening to others, listening to the feelings and needs behind others' words that empathy can be developed. Restorative processes, by giving everyone a chance to share their story, also help develop the ability to get in touch with one's own feelings so that these can be expressed in a way that gets heard and understood by others.

5. Many commentators speak of empowerment as a key feature of RPs. When participants have the opportunity to explore the causes and consequences of actions, and find their own way of addressing these, they are empowered as decision-makers and as agents of change – and this engenders belief in one's own agency which is key to active and effective citizenship. Staff no longer mete out punishment as per the code but rather support children to find a restorative way to work things out through participatory processes where the feelings, needs and opinions of those involved are central.

Many of the values I've mentioned here are of course already part of everyday life in many schools, and they are in the main nurturing and respectful places. However, when rules are broken or an incident occurs, too often it is the old paradigm of blame and punishment that surfaces, as noted in the discussion above of school Codes of Behaviour. There is a lack of coherence here with the stated aims of SPHE, and for those aims to be fully realised, there needs to be a whole-school approach which supports an empowering paradigm throughout school structures, processes and everyday language and behaviour. We need to examine the ways in which schools may need to change in order to ensure we model and teach the skills of democracy and citizenship in a fully effective way.

RPs are being used in an increasing number of Irish schools. Some, such as the schools involved in the West Tallaght Child Development Initiative, have fully trained all their staff and use RPs as a fully integrated approach throughout the school. Others have introduced some restorative practices and processes but have not (yet at least) espoused the full restorative spectrum. But around the country - in Tallaght, Ballyfermot, Donegal, central Dublin, Limerick, Cork amongst other places - RPs have been introduced, and RP trainers are busy working with schools and training staff. As yet there is little research on current practice, and hopefully this is something that will be addressed in the near future, especially now that RJ and RPs are the subject of university education modules.

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