Exploring Restorative Justice as a Means of Conflict Resolution in Further Education

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ABSTRACT

In Education, researchers have observed that institutions regularly deal with crime and conflicts, where students are victims as well as perpetrators of violence, anti-social behaviour and bullying. To create a safer environment and assist the perpetrator to reflect on the impact of their behaviour, RJ practices are adopted in some institutions to attempt to better manage and deal with such issues. In the United Kingdom, research focus on RJ is predominantly in Primary and Secondary Schools; however, research is limited and underdeveloped in the Further Education (FE) sector.

This research explored staff and students understanding and experiences of RJ; and, its constraints, limitations and opportunities of successful implementation. An interpretivist exploratory case study design framework and mixed qualitative methods were adopted. The data collection process consisted of 4 stages. *Stage 1* comprised of 20 semi-structured interviews with staff members from a Pupil Referral Unit, a Special Sixth-Form School and 5 FE Colleges. Also, 60 FE Colleges behaviour policies were analysed. The interpretivist exploratory case study of a FE College, in England, also incorporated mixed qualitative methods, which included: analysis of documents and RJ cases, 10 semi-structured interviews with staff members, 3 focus groups with students, and un-structured observations of meetings and trainings concerning RJ. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants for semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A constant comparative method was utilised to analyse all data. Data collection for this case study was split into 3 stages (2, 3 & 4). *Stage 2* explored staff and students initial understanding, experiences and implementation of RJ. *Stage 3* involved re-interviewing participants from stage 2 later in the academic year to follow how their understanding, experiences and implementation had developed; to examine this development, as part of *stage 4*, findings from stage 2 and 3 were compared.

Findings indicate that RJ policy is interrupted and/or reversed due to mergers or change in Senior Management Teams; both top-down and bottom-up approach to implementation is pivotal; teaching staff feel that a surge of violence in the country has brought a sense of insecurity within the College community, in effect, teachers feel that they are unskilled or ill-equipped to deal with or manage crime, conflict and other challenging behaviour; further, a lack of regular training and professional development programmes on RJ impacts staff understanding and delivery of the concept. This study provides an insight into how RJ is understood, experienced and implemented in FE, thus, findings from this research will be relevant to FE institutions, their staff, and the Department for Education (*Df*E).

Learning Objectives
By the end of the session, the audience will be able to:
1. Understand how staff from a Further Education institution comprehend RJ
2. Explain how staff experience RJ in a Further Education institution
3. Identify constraints, limitations and opportunities of successful implementation of RJ policy in a Further Education institution.