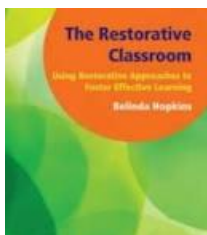


## THE RESTORATIVE CLASSROOM: Using Restorative Approaches to Foster Effective Learning

Hopkins, B. (2011). *The restorative classroom: Using restorative approaches to foster effective learning*. London, UK: Publisher: Teach to Inspire eBooks: A division of Optimus Professional Publishing, LTD., Price: £69.00

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For the past four decades, teachers, administrators and restorative justice advocates have been engaged in a movement to introduce and establish restorative practices in schools in order to transform the current negative, punitive environment into a climate that cultivates emotional development, social skills and academic achievement. Dr. Belinda Hopkins' most recent book, *The Restorative Classroom* (2011), is perhaps most significant contribution to the movement to date.

In addition to being the founder/director of Transforming Conflict, located in Berkshire, UK, Hopkins is a leader in the field of restorative justice and conflict resolution, and has authored several other books on the subject (Hopkins, 2004; Hopkins, 2009). *The Restorative Classroom* is based on the foundational pedagogy and scholarship of experts in the fields of human behavior, sociology, conflict resolution, teaching and learning and restorative justice. Hopkins closely aligns her pedagogy with that of Ellis & Tod (2009), who "base their 'Behavior for Learning' approach on three central relationships which inform a student's ability to engage with learning: their relationship with themselves; their relationship with others; and their relationship with the curriculum" (Hopkins, 2011, p.15). While much has been published in terms of restorative justice theory and research, what has been lacking until now is a theoretical, functional and mainstream "how-to" manual for those wishing to become practitioners of restorative approaches. *The Restorative Classroom* fills that need and provides the history, pedagogy and methodology one needs to build positive relationships in the classroom and throughout the school.

*The Restorative Classroom* is both an introduction to restorative approaches in the classroom and an instructional manual for teachers who seek to make, maintain and repair relationships in the classroom on a day-to-day basis. A companion to Hopkins' previous book, *Just Schools* (Hopkins, 2004), which proposes a method for implementing restorative practices school-wide, *The Restorative Classroom* primarily focuses on how to foster relationships and build community in the classroom through a variety of exercises and activities that encourage positive communication and trust-building. "After you", "However...I beg to differ...", "Ripple Effect", and "Circle Storytelling" are just a few examples of activities provided for teachers to use. Although Hopkins and others (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Morrison, 2005; Stutzman-Amstutz & Mullet, 2005) advocate for long-term and systemic and institutional culture change in schools through the adoption of school-wide restorative practices, *The Restorative Classroom* allows individual teachers to move forward and create their own restorative classrooms immediately.

The book is divided into three sections. Part One, chapters 1-3, provides the reader with a framework for understanding relational and restorative pedagogy based on the Five Key Restorative Themes:

- Everyone has their own unique and equally valued perspectives
- Thoughts influence emotions, emotions influence actions
- Empathy and consideration
- Needs and unmet needs
- Collective responsibility for problem solving and decision making. (Hopkins, 2011, p.32)

These five themes form the basis for the rest of the book. Part Two, chapters 4-9, describes a range of restorative practices and exercises, such as mixers, circles, and community-building games, as well as the step-by-step instructions on how to implement and conduct them. Part Three, Chapter 10, succinctly discusses the whole-school approach, which is explained in greater detail in *Just Schools* (Hopkins, 2004). Still, Hopkins would be remiss not to emphasize the need for the whole-school adoption of restorative practices based on current school effectiveness and improvement literature, and again asserts that "developing a restorative staffroom and staff team is likely to be a pre-requisite for a successful, high-achieving school" (Hopkins, 2011, p. 225).

*The Restorative Classroom* is available as a hardcopy and as an eBook, both of which come with supporting files, either downloadable or on a CD-ROM, that include 18 sets of cards, six figures, six tables and an adaptable policy document that teachers can customize for use with the various restorative exercises and practices illustrated in the book. Using the tools and approaches provided in *The Restorative Classroom*, teachers can facilitate and build connections and relationships with and between their students, as well as with the subject-area content.

*The Restorative Classroom* is written with the intent of reaching four audiences: those already familiar with Restorative Justice and its application in schools; those who may not have heard about restorative approaches, but have recognized that traditional classroom management only seeks compliance; those who are unclear how to develop a more caring culture in their classrooms; and others in any field, including freelance restorative trainers, social workers, volunteers and corporate managers.

Few other books have been written that give teachers such explicit directions on how to implement restorative practices in their classrooms. While restorative justice training by a seasoned practitioner is invaluable, it is not always available; therefore this book provides teachers with the means to learn about restorative practices and implement them, whether or not they are able to attend professional development training workshops.

Hopkins' unique contribution to the field is her method for teaching others how to "speak restorative", a language that closely mirrors the groundbreaking work of Marshall Rosenberg, author of *Nonviolent Communication* (Rosenberg, 1999) and *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict* (Rosenberg, 2005). Hopkins dedicates several chapters to teaching the reader how to "speak restorative."

Her pedagogy begins not with what teachers do but with what teachers say, and involves numerous exercises that focus on using language that de-escalates conflict and builds relationships, rather than exacerbates problems and alienate students.

In fact, Hopkins' years of experience as a language teacher and restorative trainer support her belief that 90% of disruptions and misbehaviors can be prevented by changing the way people in classrooms talk to one another, which is why it isn't until Chapter 9 that we learn how to "Respond Restoratively When Things Have Gone Wrong."

By providing a wide range of exercises and techniques that draw heavily upon her own expertise and experiences as well as that of other practitioners and trainers, the reader may pick and choose which approaches are most suitable for his/her individual situation. Sometimes, these exercises are referred to in one chapter, but not explained until a much later chapter, forcing the reader to jump ahead and then return. Likewise, Hopkins' own self-reflections and visions of the future are discussed in the first 10 pages of Chapter 8, which although enlightening and inspiring, would seem better situated in her conclusion in Chapter 10. Additionally, it would be optimal (though not necessarily economical) to develop a series of videos that would make learning how to conduct and facilitate the restorative exercises much easier - especially since many readers will not likely have the benefit of being trained in person.

When considering the value of the knowledge and skills that teachers glean from this book and ultimately pass on to their students, these issues pale in comparison. In addition to being the most practical and comprehensive tool currently available for helping teachers and administrators develop their skills as restorative practitioners, *The Restorative Classroom* is a work that others in the field will build upon for years to come as more and more schools around the world embrace restorative practices. Simply put, it is a must read for everyone who works with young people in any capacity.

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**Author's Note:** Because Dr. Hopkins and I had been in previous communication about our work and research in restorative justice, she asked if I would be willing to review her new book. According to APA ethical guidelines, I disclose this information about our professional relationship. However, I reviewed her book with a critical eye and believe this to be a fair and impartial review.

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