

BOOK REVIEW

Marian Liebmann, *Restorative Justice: How It Works*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2007. 472 pp.

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The proliferation of legal and extra-legal programmes based on restorative justice principles is certainly reflected in Marian Liebmann's latest book. As the title suggests, the book sets out to explain how restorative justice works in different contexts in order that "readers can get a 'feel' for it and see how many applications there are" (18). The book delivers a comprehensive overview of the many situations in which restorative justice can be applied: in the home, at school, in the criminal justice process, in prisons, and after large-scale violence or oppression.

Demonstrating the extent to which restorative justice practices are now used, this lengthy book of just under 500 pages is divided into 16 chapters. The chapters are organised into themes that can be read in progression but could also be read separately as stand-alone topics. While the book's focus is primarily on UK restorative justice approaches, there is a separate chapter describing a number of restorative practices around the world, including developments in North America, Australasia, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The author is an experienced practitioner in the application of restorative principles to conflict resolution and is clearly an enthusiast of this approach. Her optimistic view is clear when discussing the use of restorative techniques with children of playgroup and nursery-school age. She asserts:

The idea that very young children can learn restorative approaches to resolve conflicts is one that has great power – imagine a world in which all children have the opportunity to learn them as one of their first skills! This could significantly increase the world's resources to manage conflict and harm of all kinds (115-116).

The purpose of the book is “to fill the gap between the introductory texts on restorative justice and those examining the many complex issues around its implementation” (17). Since most of the book is dedicated to describing the wide range of practical applications of restorative justice, the first two chapters on the principles and history of restorative justice are also descriptive in nature and tend not to engage in critical appraisal of the many contested conceptual and definitional issues that other authors examine (e.g., Dignan 2002; Doolin 2007; Gavrielides 2008). However, chapter 13 considers some conceptual issues such as the nature of voluntarism, shame and forgiveness and chapter 14 discusses questions arising from research such as whether restorative justice can prevent or reduce offending, procedural fairness, cost effectiveness, and ‘what works’ in implementing restorative approaches.

The author defines restorative justice broadly as aiming “to restore the well-being of victims, offenders and communities damaged by crime, and to prevent further offending” (25). Consequently, in Chapter 3 she includes some approaches such as Victim Support, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, and Children’s Hearings in Scotland, which are not commonly considered restorative because of the lack of attempts to bring together victims and offenders. Descriptions of processes more usually found in restorative justice texts, such as victim-offender mediation, forms of conferencing, and peace-making circles, are presented in Chapter 4.

Using examples primarily from the UK, Chapters 5 to 10 describe the use of restorative justice with children at home and at school, with young and adult offenders, and in prison. Chapter 7 on the use of restorative approaches for young offenders in the UK includes the interesting development of youth conferencing in Northern Ireland. Of significance, recent research is presented that shows the rate of victim participation to be very encouraging, at 69 per cent. This is much higher than in many other restorative justice programmes, for example, referral orders with young offenders in England and Wales in which victim participation rates have been as low as 13 per cent (Newburn et al 2002: 41).

Several chapters demonstrate the extensive situations in which restorative justice is now applied. The view that “the punitive ethos of prisons would be totally hostile to the ideas of restorative justice” (201) is challenged in Chapters 9 and 10. The first of these presents examples of attempts to use restorative approaches in prison, community service projects, victim awareness courses, victim-offender groups, and victim-offender mediation and conferencing. Interesting case studies are given

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where face-to-face meetings have occurred between victim and offender after very serious crimes. The following chapter focuses on the use of restorative principles to help build relationships in the prison community. Recent developments discussed include anti-bullying procedures, peer mediation training in young offender institutions, and the use of 'restorative consultants' in Belgian prisons.

Chapter 12 describes restorative projects from the UK and other jurisdictions that try to use restorative principles in cases involving domestic violence, sexual violence, hate crime, and gang violence – situations that are often deemed unsuitable for restorative intervention. Chapter 15 widens the focus by considering attempts to apply restorative principles after large-scale violence, such as mass murder, torture and oppression, including the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and projects in Rwanda, East Timor, Latin America, Northern Ireland and the Balkans.

Of particular interest to the author is the use of drama, art and music as part of restorative justice approaches. In this engaging chapter - a novel addition to any restorative justice text - there are case studies detailing the use of dramas and role plays in prisons, insightful pictures drawn by offenders showing their understanding of the harm they have caused, mosaics or weavings made by offenders as part of their reparation for offences of criminal damage or burglary, and examples of songs composed by young offenders as part of their apology to the victim. The author concludes: "The arts manage to engage people emotionally, which in turn leads to greater awareness. The arts can also help victims to heal after large-scale violence, and can bring people together to explore their future" (417).

There are over 200 case studies included of mostly positive accounts where restorative justice approaches have been successful. There are also chapter summaries and a detailed list of references given at the end of each chapter. The appendices include a glossary of terms, a five-page list of further reading and resources, and a separate list of organisations and websites related to restorative justice.

The book presents a detailed overview of the many ways restorative justice is now used for dealing with harms involving individuals, small communities and after large-scale violence or oppression. This book will serve well those unfamiliar with restorative justice who wish to find out about the different contexts in which it can be applied. The book will also be of interest to practitioners who want to increase

their knowledge about using restorative justice principles for conflict resolution in other situations. Finally, it will be useful for students because of the extent of restorative justice contexts considered and, particularly, the wide-ranging reference material provided.

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