

2015 SABBATICAL REPORT

My focus was on Restorative Practice. I asked three questions:

1. How effective has Restorative Practice been in changing culture for the better in secondary schools?
2. What innovations are schools implementing so that Restorative Practice is embedded and sustained in secondary schools?
3. How effective have the Ministry of Education generated resources been in the trial schools, in particular, the kete?

In the course of my sabbatical in Term 3 of 2015 I visited 11 schools. Ten of these were secondary schools and one was a primary school. They were based in the regions of Taranaki, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Horowhenua, Hutt Valley and Canterbury. In all of the 10 secondary schools I visited the senior leadership team, teachers and support staff reported a positive change of culture. The key evidence presented was the reduction of stand downs and suspensions, but in many cases numbers still fluctuate. They mentioned a calmer atmosphere, for example, “teachers shouting is a rarity now”. That quote was given to me by a reliever who had been relieving in that particular school, prior to the implementation of RP and post implementation. More student and teacher voices were heard through greater use of circles. There was greater staff and student involvement in decision making.

I was told that students at the school are now more respectful, polite and resilient. The language that is used by students and staff is restorative. For example, rather than using blame words, teachers are asking themselves what can they do to address the concern? There is a shift from teachers doing things TO students, to working WITH students.

Also in many schools, detentions are a thing of the past and they have been replaced by win:win consequences usually with a service component attached and some element of reflection by the students in terms of the wrong choices made.

One point I noted was that in some schools there was clearly distributed leadership and there was succession planning taking place, so that if one or two key personnel left the school, there would be no serious threat to restorative practices being lost by the school. However, in a significant group of colleges that I visited there was a heroic style of leadership and in these cases the staff involved with RP were passionate and effective but I wondered if the actual place of RP at the school was fragile.

INNOVATIONS DEVELOPED BY SCHOOLS

- One school developed a Restorative Action Plan which outlined key tasks for lead coaches, deans, form teachers and heads of department.
As an aside it is worth noting there is a discontinuity between the uptake taken by Deans and the uptake shown by Heads of Department with regards to RP.

- A school had unpacked Keke Book 2, “Restorative Essentials”, and broke it down into themes and focus groups – different aspects were effectively programmed throughout the year.
- One school had generated a timetable where various RP coaches were available at different times throughout the week for facilitating mini-chats or mentoring staff as well as providing feedback using structured observation workshops/worksheets. It is worth noting they had worked very hard at developing trust amongst staff.
- One school had made an effort in using RP words in both English and Maori.
- Some secondary schools worked closely with other secondary schools and showed the value of collaboration related to RP. An example was the relationship and collaboration between the two south Taranaki high schools, Hawera High and Opunake High School.
- A few schools were working very closely with the local Police with regards to RP. Schools which had a community constable attached to them assisted this process.
- Other schools had employed key non-teaching staff with past experience working with youth at risk that often were the school’s interface with the community.
- Another initiative was linking RP with neuro science. I was shown an excellent training powerpoint presentation that was given to the teachers in a particular area in terms of effectively working out what part of the brain the student was functioning in. The argument was at times it is pointless to interact in a negative fashion with a student that is operating through the brain stem.
- Another innovation was having a Teacher Aide or support staff member within the RP Implementation Team who would be useful as a devil’s advocate. The training of support staff remained a challenge for many schools.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MOE RESOURCES

- All trial schools have appreciated the ketes. The use of them has been variable although all of them appreciated the practical nature of the ketes which have made professional learning related to RP easier.
- One of the effective issues that the kete displays is the importance of follow up and that is something that schools are still working on to be more effective.
- A number of schools valued input from Marg Thorsborne, Greg Jansen and Ritchie Mattla, particularly when RP was introduced at their school.

CONCERNS

- As is stated earlier many of the schools have one or two key individuals with little evidence of succession planning with regards to RP. There is a clear need for more distributed leadership.
- At least three of the school have relied extensively on external facilitators to be the focus for RP so that RP understanding across the staff is patchy.
- There is a need for more collaboration with other schools.
- Restorative Practice between two members of staff remains a challenge for many schools.

READING

I read a number of books during my sabbatical. I summarised each of these educational books and have used these to inform my practice as well as feed relevant educational information into schools to progress pedagogy further.:

1. *The Four Disciplines of Execution by McChesney, Covey and Huling*

One of the key things I gained from this book was the folly of setting too many goals. If you set two to three goals it results in two to three goals being achieved. If you set four to 10 goals it results in one goal being achieved. If you set 11 to 20 goals it results in no goals achieved.

2. *Implementing Restorative Practices in Schools by Margaret Thorsborne and Peta Blood*

In this book was a really helpful prescriptive checklist of what a healthy restorative school looks like. This would be extremely valuable for schools in assessing how effective their RP initiative has been.

3. *Start With Why by Simon Sinek*

He states that most organisations start with “what” and go to “why” whereas inspiring organisations start with “why” and then move to “how and what”. The why must come first as it provides the context for everything else.

4. *Peer Coaching by Pam Robbins*

This book asks the question of how peer coaching can foster meaningful personalised professional growth for staff and magnify the importance of exemplary teaching. It deals with the challenge of teaching staff giving and taking advice respectfully.

5. *Creative Schools by Ken Robinson*

Ken stated that the heart of education is the relationship between the teacher and the student. Before schools address curriculum and assessment you first need to look at the culture of the school. Cultural changes must come before curriculum changes, not the other way around. The key task of a Principal is to build a community among the students and teachers who need to share a common set of purposes.