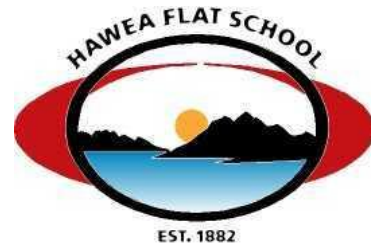


Sabbatical Report

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Restorative Practices and Behaviour Management

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Hawea Flat School Board of Trustees for encouraging and supporting my application for sabbatical leave, the staff and especially my very able Deputy Principal who made sure the school ran smoothly during my absence.

To the Ministry of Education of Education for making sabbatical leave available for principals. Having the opportunity to pursue an area for future development and return revitalised and refreshed is invaluable.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge Margaret Thorsborne. It was her work in this area that began my journey. The contacts provided were invaluable in developing my knowledge and understanding of a restorative approach.

Lastly my thanks to my colleagues both here and overseas, who gave so generously of their time to share their experiences of restorative practice and what this looks like in their schools.

Purpose

- 1. To investigate whether the application restorative justice principles in primary schools is an effective way to help children manage their own behaviour.**

And if so,

- 2. To develop a behaviour management plan that incorporates the principles of restorative justice and apply this consistently across the school.**

The creation of a supportive learning environment where students can develop the capabilities to enable them to succeed in a world very different to the one we are in now is the vision for learners at our school. Developing a school culture that encourages children to be responsible for themselves and responsible for their learning and to respect others and respect property, is pivotal in all that we do at Hawea Flat School. It is time to revisit our behaviour management systems to determine whether the procedures currently in place are helping or hindering our children to manage their behaviour and develop the interpersonal skills necessary to deal with conflict in a constructive manner.

Questions to ponder:

How effective are restorative justice practices in reducing incidents of challenging behaviour for primary school children?

How have primary school principals gone about introducing restorative justice principles to their staff, students and community?

Is our current behaviour management system a true reflection of our school's values?

Does our current practice help children take responsibility for managing their own behaviour?

Are our children developing the interpersonal skills needed to cope with conflict in a constructive manner?

Rationale and Background Information

The behaviour management system at our school is based around the 4 R's – 'respect others, respect property, be responsible for myself and responsible for my learning' and encapsulates the values expressed in our school charter. Teachers co-construct with their class what the 4 R's mean in terms of the way they treat others and the environment along with the goals they have for themselves and their learning. Although not explicitly stated, the goal is to develop a shared understanding of appropriate behaviours and a consistent approach to behaviour management across the school. The socio-cultural view of learning developed by Vygotsky fits with our belief that teaching and learning is a collaborative process. In this context, teachers and learners participate together to identify behaviours that will help create a supportive and fun learning environment. Teachers scaffold the learning by modelling the behaviours and values contained in the 4 R's (Bourke, Lawrence, McGee, O'Neill, & Curzon, 2008). The consequence for any inappropriate behaviour involves the teacher giving two warnings before the student is removed from the class to complete a reflection sheet. While the desired outcome is to diminish the occurrence of the inappropriate behaviour, data collected indicates that it is often the same children sent out of class and that their inappropriate behaviours are not diminishing. These children are not taking responsibility for, or managing their behaviour. Something else needs to happen to help reduce these inappropriate behaviours. Our current approach is more punitive than restorative. If our students feel they have no voice or control over what happens they are likely to become disengaged and feel excluded. An inclusive approach recognises the 'cultural, physical and intellectual diversity in schools' where 'relationships and values are defined by the institution's social practices' (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007, p. 196). The time has come to look more closely at our current behaviour management practices.

Activities undertaken

1. Read, read and read some more.

Having the time to research and read articles, books, journals around restorative practice has been so valuable. It has given me time to reflect on my practice, clarify my beliefs and identify next steps as well as the opportunity to talk with other professionals both here and overseas who wrote or contributed to some of the books I read.

2. Professional Development Workshops

Along with two other staff members, I attended a 3 day facilitator training session on Restorative Practices in Schools. Margaret Thorsborne, an Australian based consultant, facilitated the training workshop and was able to suggest places to visit and people to talk to in Australia and the United Kingdom.

3. Visits

During my time in the United Kingdom I met with Marcia Lewis from the Lewisham Action on Mediation Project (LAMP) and found out more about how schools in the Lewisham borough are using restorative approaches.

In Melbourne, I visited Kilsyth Primary School and Rolling Hills Primary School, spending

time in classrooms and talking with principals and senior management teams about restorative practices.

Findings

Snippets from my reading:

It was reported in the Dominion Post 4 March 2009 that studies undertaken by the Ministry of Education suggest that up to 20 per cent of children at some time display serious behavioural problems including fighting, substance abuse and vandalism and that about 37,500 school children demonstrate the most severe forms of destructive and challenging behaviour. If left unchecked this is likely to result in poor educational attainment and long-term problems for society as a whole such as unemployment, psychiatric disorders, mental health issues and criminal offending. Research has found that student misbehaviour affects teacher stress, well-being, and confidence and also impacts negatively on student learning time and academic achievements (Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2003 as cited in Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008). Developing effective classroom behaviour management is instrumental in keeping teachers in the profession and students actively engaged in their learning.

Restorative practices have been successfully used in schools in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada but implementation has been patchy and there is wide variation in the approaches used (Varnham, 2005). Restorative practices are based on principles of inclusion, the repair of harm, reintegration reinforced by strong support networks (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007). The concept of responsibility and restoration of relationships rather than retribution is the focus. This fits with Māori beliefs where there has been a tradition of holding a hui to resolve conflict (Wearmouth, et al., 2007).

Conflict is a part of life. Students need to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to handle conflicts in a constructive way (Longaretti & Wilson, 2000). An Australian study in 2001 by the Centre for Restorative Justice at Australian National University investigated how the principles of restorative justice could be used in primary schools. The programme, called REACT, aimed at helping Year 5 students develop responsible citizenship. It involved 5 principles: 'Repair the harm done; Expect the best from others; Acknowledge feelings/harm done; Care for others; Take responsibility for behaviour/feelings' (Varnham, 2005, p. 97) Students and teachers reported that the programme was effective in creating a fun and safe learning community and developing conflict resolution skills (Varnham, 2005).

While conferencing can be an effective way of responding to inappropriate behaviour, it is not enough to achieve long-term change. Organisational and cultural change is needed for the successful implementation and sustainability of a restorative philosophy. Restorative practices focus on the quality of relationships between all members of the school community. Repairing the harm done forces everyone to examine their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that may have contributed to the conflict. Challenging mind-sets is where cultural change begins (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005). Culture is sometimes described as 'the way we do things around here'. There are many cues that signal to new staff what the culture of the

school is. It is not what we say we do that signals what is valued but rather the messages that are picked up as a result of the behaviour and systems in place. If change is to occur then it has to happen at all levels and begin with the school's leadership team.

Kouzes and Posner (1997) as cited by Blood and Thorsborne (2005) suggest five fundamental practices that enable leaders to effect change. This could be a very useful framework to use as we move towards a more restorative approach to relationship management.

Stage 1: Gaining Commitment

Making a case for change by challenging current practice and unpacking people's beliefs around behaviour management and what makes a difference.

Stage 2: Developing a shared vision – knowing where we are going and why

This means everyone – staff, students, BOT, and the parent community know what a restorative approach to behaviour management involves. Together we will build a framework of practice and develop a common language around relationship building.

Stage 3: Developing Responsive and Effective Practice

This is about changing how we do things around here; developing a range of responses; providing training and support; monitoring

Stage 4: Developing a Whole School Approach – putting it all together

This means making sure our policies and procedures match our new practice; managing the transition

Stage 5: Professional Relationships – walking the talk with each other

Promoting open, honest, transparent and fair working relationships; using restorative processes for managing staff grievance, performance management and conflict; challenging practice and behaviour

Professional Development Workshop

The 3 day facilitator training delivered by Margaret Thorsborne is one of the most valuable professional development sessions I have attended. Margaret is a skilled presenter, passionate about a restorative approach and how this can be used in schools as an effective way of responding to incidents like bullying, conflict and violence. Marg provided a lot of theoretical and practical background information about restorative practices in a variety of contexts.

The training involved a lot of structured role-play which certainly helped me become very familiar with the format of the restorative conference. Having now had the opportunity to run 'no-blame' classroom meetings and community conferences back in my school, I am so very glad that I had role-played a variety of scenarios at the training session. The opportunity to practise using the scripted conversations in a supportive environment made the process back at school so much easier. I cannot recommend highly enough participating in one of Marg's

facilitator training sessions if as a school you are thinking of embarking on a restorative approach.

Visits

The Lewisham Experience

While in London, I was fortunate enough to meet with Marcia Lewis who works for the Lewisham Action on Mediation Project (LAMP). The Lewisham area is best described as low socio-economic with many different ethnicities represented. There has been a lot of money spent recently on council housing and rebuilding secondary schools. Unfortunately the money ran out before the primary schools were rebuilt, so many are old brick buildings surrounded by high walls topped with barbed wire. LAMP is an independent organisation working in schools and in the community. The work undertaken in schools is two-fold. There is training for teachers around restorative practice as well as training for students. Conflict resolution is seen as a life-skill. By teaching children how to do this in a positive way it is hoped that the skills will be transferred into their adult life.

Initially the Lewisham borough decided that schools would receive training in restorative practices and this approach has been used in primary and secondary schools to varying degrees since 2003. Schools have reported that this has resulted in improved emotional literacy, fewer confrontational incidents, a decrease in the number of students sent out of class, a better atmosphere in the playground and fewer exclusions. None of the Lewisham schools using restorative practices have abandoned sanctions but most have reported that they need to use formal sanctions less often since adopting restorative practices.

While some schools just used a restorative approach to deal with the most serious incidents, many soon realised that this approach needed to link with how teachers manage classroom and playground behaviour as well as the health and social science curriculum. In some schools, a restorative approach encompasses all aspects of school life and includes everyone – students, staff, parents, wider community members. It becomes relationship management not behaviour management. These schools report that it has taken time (2-5 years) to embed a restorative approach in a school's culture, and that they needed a critical mass of adults and students to shift the school's culture to begin with.

Kilsyth Primary School and Rolling Hills Primary School

Both these schools have a strong commitment to restorative practice and it was great to hear their journeys and spend time in classrooms. Both schools are TRIBES schools and feel that this fits in well with a restorative approach. Tribes is a step-by-step process to achieve specific learning goals. It is not a programme or a collection of activities but rather a 'process to assure the healthy development of every child so that they have the knowledge, skills and

resiliency to be successful in a rapidly changing world' (Gibbs, 2006). Four agreements are honoured:

- Attentive listening
- Appreciation / no put downs
- Mutual respect
- The right to pass

Students learn a set of collaborative skills so they can work well together in long-term groups (tribes). The focus is on how to:

- Help each other work on tasks
- Set goals and solve problems
- Monitor and assess progress
- Celebrate achievements

Emphasis is placed on giving children opportunities to manage their learning and behaviour. The classrooms I observed demonstrated how successful this process has been. Children knew what their goals were; they helped each other on tasks; they could identify the progress they had made and what their next learning might be; they treated each other with respect. Classroom teachers were very clear in their expectations and there was a consistency of approach right across the school. One teacher told me how she uses 'circles' many times during the course of the day with her Grade 1 class to find out how everyone is feeling at the start of the day; to set goals; to make sure everyone knows what they are working on; to find out who needs help to complete a task and more importantly who they could go to for help. The classroom atmosphere was one of mutual respect with children working collaboratively sharing and celebrating their own and others' achievements.

Discussions with principals and management teams confirmed the importance of having a shared vision, providing support and training for staff and information for parents and the community. Both schools stressed that change doesn't happen overnight and that shifts in the school's culture has taken time (3 or more years). There are still challenges, particularly as staff changes but the benefits are there. Most playtime incidents are sorted out by the children themselves, sometimes with help from the playground duty teachers who wear high visibility vests making them easy to find. The restorative approach focuses on healing the relationship between the 'wrongdoer' and those affected by the behaviour. Duty teachers carry the 'chat card' with them to ensure there is a consistency of approach and note down the names of children involved. Community surveys have indicated that there is little bullying within the school. Formal sanctions like stand-downs or suspensions have reduced. It is not just about behaviour management or classroom management but rather relationship management.

Implications

- The philosophy behind restorative practice is around creating a culture of caring and accountability. It involves far more than just changing our behaviour management

system. It is relationship management and as such involves all the relationships that exist within our school between staff, students, parents and the wider community.

- Cultural shift takes time – three to five years. A lot of research has been done on effective ways of bringing about cultural shift – leadership is paramount to the success of any cultural shift.
- A restorative approach involves a shift in thinking. For many staff and parents, the restorative approach will challenge their beliefs around how challenging and inappropriate behaviour can be managed.
- A review of our current policies around relationship management, perhaps beginning with behaviour management procedures will help clarify existing beliefs and current practice.
- Time will be needed to build staff knowledge and understanding around restorative approaches. Students and parents will also need opportunities to find out more about what this approach means in practice, especially as some school's reported that initially parents viewed this as a 'soft option'.
- Professional development for staff is essential.
- Formal sanctions like stand-downs, suspension, exclusion will remain in place as a restorative approach can only work if all parties want to work through that process and there is clarity and agreement around what happened.
- A restorative approach can be used at many levels within the school context from minor playground incidents and inappropriate behaviour in class to more serious incidents like bullying, 'challenging class behaviour', theft and vandalism.
- Circle time or the use of circles helps children to develop social and co-operative skills and build emotional literacy. After seeing 'circles' used to great effect, there is no doubt that this is an effective way to develop a collaborative, safe learning environment for all our students.
- Develop an action plan to introduce a more restorative approach as part of our strategic plan for the next three years.
- Keep reading and talking to colleagues around restorative approaches, leading change and cultural shift.

Our Journey so far

A review of our behaviour management system provided a useful starting point and is underway. Teachers have noticed that our current practice is not having the desired effect of reducing the incidents of inappropriate behaviours despite having unpacked what the 4 R's look like, sound like and feel like in different contexts. So while we are 'talking the talk', this

is not being transferred into action, particularly by some of the senior students. One of the critical missing links is around accountability. These children think that as there has been a consequence for their inappropriate behaviour that is the end of the matter. But genuine accountability means facing up to what you have done, taking responsibility for your actions, deciding how to make things right and then taking steps to repair the harm done. Now, if a child is sent out of class, there is a restorative chat and the child completes a reflection sheet with help if necessary. This is providing some useful data around behaviour management.

The questions asked include:

- Tell me what happened
- What were you thinking at the time?
- Who has been affected by what you've done?
- In what way?
- What can you do to make things right?
- How can I help you?

The restorative chat helps identify what the inappropriate behaviour was, who has been affected and how, and what needs to happen to make things right. Even though this approach has only been in place for 5 weeks, teachers have commented that it seems to be making a difference. The next step will be for playground duty teachers to use the 'restorative chat' to deal with playground incidents. Keeping a record of these 'chats' will provide data on the nature and seriousness of incidents over time. The Lewisham experience indicates that it is important to have children trained so that they can use the restorative chat to help resolve low level playground incidents. This will be investigated further, possibly using an approach similar to peer mediation.

Circles or circle time is operating in every classroom. The rules for circle time are very similar to those used in TRIBES and for classroom meetings. Everyone has an opportunity to either contribute or pass. Only the person holding the 'talking piece' can speak. There are no put-downs. Circles help children build positive relationships and develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities around learning and behaviour. Teachers have had the opportunity to observe our Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) taking circle time with their class and the RTLB has supported teachers take circle time sessions. While there is an expectation that circle time will happen each week, some teachers are using circles on a daily basis to talk about playground incidents or set goals for learning and behaviour.

Parents of Y5/6 students attended a community meeting to find out more about how a restorative approach is being used in the classroom. There had been concerns about the amount of learning time that was being wasted as a result of teachers having to deal with inappropriate behaviours e.g. swearing, interrupting others' learning, calling out, teasing and name calling. After facilitating 'no blame' class meetings in two rooms, the children came up with a class agreement outlining what behaviours had to stop and what would happen if the agreement was broken. It was a very powerful process and changes are happening as a

result. The classroom teachers are using circle time to monitor how the agreement is going. Parents are on board and supportive of the approach and are keen to come along to further sessions to explore the restorative approach in more depth.

For the remainder of this year

- Continue with the review of policies and procedures so they reflect a restorative approach.
- Analyse reflection sheets to collate data on frequency and type of playground and classroom incidents; number of stand-downs.
- Support teachers by using those staff already trained to facilitate restorative meetings.
- Provide opportunities for staff training, information sessions for parents and other community members.
- Investigate availability of restorative facilitator training sessions for teachers.
- Develop action plan for 2012

Conclusions

A restorative approach requires a philosophical shift and should guide the way we act in all our relationships. It is not something 'extra' to teach or a set of activities that children are guided through. A restorative approach is a way to manage inappropriate behaviour where the relationships between all parties concerned are healed. It allows mistakes to be processed so that they are part of the learning process. This simple definition has been used by some Melbourne schools and is easily understood by students, teachers and the school community (Prior, 2000).

The values in our charter reflect a restorative approach rather than a more traditional punishment approach. Policies and procedures around relationship management need to be reviewed and developed to better reflect these values. By revisiting and regularly reviewing these policies and procedures and unpacking what this looks like, sounds like and feels at our school, with staff, students and parents, a collaborative, caring culture will develop where the focus is on repairing the harm done and healing relationships.

When teachers develop positive relationships with their students and help them develop these relationships with each other, learning happens. There is a decrease in the incidents of inappropriate behaviours making more time for learning. Many schools both here and overseas are using a restorative approach effectively to help children manage their own behaviour. If we want to equip our students to be 'the best they can be' helping them build strong, positive relationships with others is an essential skill. Knowing how to repair the harm done when things go wrong is a life skill that we all need. Our journey is underway. It won't be an easy one and it will take time but it will make a difference.

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