

Sabbatical Inquiry and Report 2011:

Strengthen restorative practices and broaden the understanding of its implications for Opoho School as a learning community

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Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the Opoho School Board of Trustees, the Ministry of Education and NZEI for the opportunity and support to participate in the sabbatical opportunity. Thanks also to Greg Hurley, the leadership, teaching and support staff team at Opoho School for their sterling work and taking on additional responsibilities during my time out of school;

Thank you to Roz Miller for her ongoing professional conversations about restorative practices and other leadership and learning matters;

To many professional colleagues including Brent Caldwell, Bernadette Newlands, Debbie Smith, Wendy Brookes and many others for support and discussions related to my sabbatical focus, and to Margaret Thorsborne for her ongoing inspiration including professional training opportunities over the last two years;

Thank you to the Otago Primary Principals' Association for its support to attend the 2011 ICP Conference.

Activities Undertaken:

The sabbatical has provided the opportunity to:

Attend specific training in Restorative Practices with expert Margaret Thorsborne and read view, and review related 'Restorative Practice' manuals and articles.

Read, discuss and reflect on a range of publications about restorative practices and related topics;

Review school documentation in response to reflections;

Visit schools and discuss practical learning experiences, implementation and policies;

Attend an international conference including sessions related to implementing restorative practices and social justice;

Refresh, recharge and refocus.

Executive Summary

Opoho School aims to be a place of significant learning. Dr Stephen Covey advocates that no significant learning can take place without significant relationships. The proactive processes of a restorative philosophy aim to enhance teaching and learning – improve curriculum delivery, pedagogical processes and learner engagement underpinned by 'significant relationships'.

It is paramount that schools take a lead role in conflict resolution and facilitate ways to

build or restore relationships thereby providing young people with a model of practice of how to constructively deal with issues in the most respectful way possible.

By refining current practice and more fully adopting restorative practises and embedding these, including other social constructs such as circle time (further detail later in the report), Opoho School can be more socially and culturally inclusive in responding to wrongdoing that impacts on inclusion, social justice and equitable outcomes for everyone *and* become an even stronger learning community.

Supporting the community to further understand restorative practices is also critical if young people are to have confidence that the concepts can be universally applied to all aspects of their lives.

Purpose:

To strengthen the school-wide commitment to a culture of positive connected relationships, constructive conflict resolution and deeper learning by investigating ways to consistently implement restorative practices across our school.

Rationale:

At Opoho School a constructivist approach is used to enhance relationships and resolve issues of conflict. A predominantly harmonious, learning focused culture prevails where teachers routinely facilitate collaborative decision-making in classes, a social skills programme aims to enhance relationships, and agreed values are generally modeled by most people in our school community.

A meticulous analysis of some problematic social situations and a range of intermittent 'random' behaviours by individuals or groups that interrupts learning and teaching, highlights situations that should benefit to a greater degree from the implementation of more consistent school-wide 'restorative' practices. While current strategies to bring about change are constructivist in their approach and actions compatible with restorative practices, some punitive actions are used albeit rarely as a last resort e.g. a student removed from his/her own class, a student completes work at recess that should have been completed during class time are illustrations.

For a small number of individual students there is a tendency to blame others for situations of conflict or behaviour that transgresses expected social interactions, and the level of denial to take responsibility of one's actions is evident and compatible with this "defense".

The harmony of some social groups spasmodically affected by disrespectful actions seems a regular situation within certain cohorts of children, both now and in the past. The ensuing and not always measurable or obvious impact on learning and emotional wellbeing deserves more attention.

Current strategies satisfactorily solve many problems, some *seem* resolved although subsequent issues are often analogous to the original situation, and some reoccur with no sustained changes.

With this evidence and after ten years of using a school-developed restorative-like process (collaborative problem solving) to resolve issues of conflict, it is timely to again review and strengthen the process. In the most recent community survey some parents indicated that although their child was predominantly happy at, and benefiting from school, a small

percentage of children did not always feel safe at school. The survey also sought information from parents about their satisfaction in relation to the principal's attention to resolving issues where the responses indicated 89% were happy that issues had been resolved to their satisfaction. Although the survey questions did not explicitly correlate the question about safety at school with the level of satisfaction for resolving issues, as principal, I conclude some association. Some families also indicated that their child had experienced bullying during his/her time at school. Other incidents of conflict in the playground or classroom are also labelled as 'bullying' by parents or children. Day – to – day upsets to social harmony and some more sustained social situations of a minor or major nature provide additional determination to improve the inclusiveness and respectful relationships within our school community.

Of concern and requiring unabated attention, is any percentage of children who are not happy at school or accusations of bullying. Emotional intelligence and wellbeing has a direct correlation with one's ability to think and learn therefore it must underpin all that occurs in school as a social organisation all children are required to attend. The strength of social organisations is founded on the depth of the respect between people, individually and collectively.

The most conducive environment for optimum learning must be free of emotional stresses for and between individuals. Understanding the impact of social interactions that occur between individuals can determine the effectiveness of learning experiences. A teachers' best intentions to do this combined with well planned quality learning opportunities can be lost for individuals when social interactions go awry. The adverse affect on a learner's capacity and capability to learn can be significant. The domino effect of such experiences can be anything from minor to major depending on the resilience of individuals. The degree of the disconnections can often be kept 'masked' from caring adults for puzzling reasons e.g. power and control factors; levels of shame; eagerness to sort it within the group or taking advice from another significant adult such as a parent trying to support from backstage.

'I just couldn't even think during maths time because I was so upset by what happened at morning-tea time (personal conversation, Year 5 student, 2011). This single declaration demonstrates a complex array of 'disconnections' that disrespectful social interactions have the potential to create. Human beings have an innate aptitude for problem solving. The means by how this is fostered and facilitated determines, it seems, whether managing self and interactions between individuals occurs at a respectful level or at a diminished, less constructive level. Different levels of personal individual development can impact on the ability of the members of a group to reach a successful resolve. When it is unresolved by the participants, a facilitated restorative dialogue, conversation or conference is necessary and likely to be the most powerful action to bring about reflection, repair and reconnection. Langley & Hansberry (2008) state that we need to "be as purposeful in teaching young people how to be disciplined as we are in teaching them to read and write...."

Being disciplined involves understanding and knowing the skills of managing one's behaviour, taking responsibility for, including understanding the impact of one's actions and putting right any wrong-doing that harms others.

After attending training in restorative practices with Margaret Thorsborne it also became evident that the 'restorative conversations' that had been in use at our school could be further improved to ensure the participants had greater control over, and responsibility for *all* aspects of the process.

From a global perspective it is also disconcerting to read in the 2007 UNICEF report on the wellbeing of children and adolescents sobering statistics presented about a range of indicators related to child wellbeing, some of which related to children’s perspectives on whether peers are kind and helpful – behaviours we know are integral to respectful relationships. A restorative culture is highly compatible with building and maintaining respectful relationships.

A level of ‘social chaos’ and punitive conflict resolution strategies sought and used in communities provides many with a sense of disquiet about the situation and a determination to assist individuals to lead successful, productive lives *and* to seek ways to further develop the means for people to establish harmonious and respectful communities. Individual, and therefore community wellbeing is imperative to this goal. While no single measure or statistic is exclusively reliable or practical for promoting change, the motivation for new and improved direction should be informed by reliable local, national and international research.

Findings:

In times of stress or in times of change, we often return to our ‘original cultural’ according to Jennifer James, a cultural anthropologist who addressed the 2012 ICP Principals’ Conference, which may offer some, although not a conclusive explanation for less than optimum relationships that many impact on our day-to-day lives. It may help us understand any deviation from the school’s more inclusive intentions in response to unacceptable behaviours that disrupt learning or social connections. Children, developing ways of build and sustain relationships can act in ways that create harm and require ongoing support to learn how to reflect, repair and reconnect. Teachers, with the best intentions and training sometimes implement a punitive strategy that is one from a former era or that seems practical in the light of an urgent situation with all things considered e.g. resources on hand, pressure of immediate needs of other children in the class, imminent safety of students, the lack of time or training to implement a ‘restorative’ conversation.

When a ‘restorative’ process has been less effective than expected or desired as is the case in some situations at our school, the process must be scrutinised and where necessary, improved. More learning and training is also imperative.

After attending a one-day seminar ‘Restorative Practices in Schools – Rethinking Behaviour Management’ in 2010 and an additional three day training programme in 2011 with expert Margaret Thorsborne some adjustments were implemented to our school’s existing ‘collaborative problem solving’ process. Comparison of the processes highlighted that our former sequence of questions and the highly restorative ‘authoritative – reintegrative’ model as represented in the ‘social discipline window’ were not exclusively compatible, nor all the steps exclusively ‘collaborative’. The most significant difference was minimising the participants opportunity to talk (wrong-doer and victim) and take responsibility (wrong doer) for the impact of the behaviours that had occurred.

Comparison of Processes		
Opoho School	Restorative Model	
	Wrong-doer	Victim
What happened? <i>(asked to the wrongdoer and the victim, sometimes individually)</i>	What happened? What were you thinking at	What did you think when it happened? What have you thought

<p><i>and at other times, together)</i></p> <p>What were you thinking?</p>	<p>the time?</p> <p>What have you thought about since?</p>	<p>about since?</p>
<p><i>The teacher/facilitator provided a summary of events of the situation (to clarify that information was correct and make any cross references to determine accuracy as necessary) and would outline to the wrongdoer where this was a transgression from the school's values – using the school's code of conduct</i></p>	<p>Who do you think has been affected by what you did?</p> <p>In what way?</p>	<p>How has this affected you?</p> <p>What has been the worst of it?</p>
<p>What can be done to put this right (to both parties)?</p> <p>What will you need to do (asked of the wrong-doer)?</p> <p>What help do you need?</p>	<p>What do you need to do to put things right?</p> <p>How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?</p> <p>What can I do to help you?</p>	<p>What is needed to put things right?</p> <p>How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?</p>

By strengthening the process, especially by engaging the wrong-doer in identifying who has been affected and how by his or her actions, the goal is that the wrong-doer will take greater ownership and responsibility for his/her behaviour. Greater impact may also result from strategically involving parents, caregivers or significant others who the wrong-doer holds in high regard, in the structured restorative conversations or conferences. In the past the timing and intensity of this has been undertaken on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the teachers and principal. Generally on-site parent involvement occurred at the time of the equivalent of a restorative conference.

The New Zealand Revised Curriculum 2010 and the policy and philosophy of Opoho School provide insightful direction that supports the principles of restorative practice through the vision, principles, key competencies and values. Intrinsically interwoven, some provide more direct relativity with regard to human relationships and must continue to be given the high priority afforded at our school.

Participating and contributing This competency is about being actively involved in communities. Communities include family, whānau, and school and those based, for example, on a common interest or culture. They may be drawn together for purposes such as learning, work, celebration, or recreation. They may be local, national, or global. This competency includes a capacity to contribute appropriately as a group member, to make connections with others, and to create opportunities for others in the group.

Students who participate and contribute in communities have a sense of belonging and the confidence to participate within new contexts. They understand the importance of balancing rights, roles, and responsibilities and of contributing to the quality and

sustainability of social, cultural, physical, and economic environments.

Relating to others Relating to others is about interacting effectively with a diverse range of people in a variety of contexts. This competency includes the ability to listen actively, recognise different points of view, negotiate, and share ideas.

Students who relate well to others are open to new learning and able to take different roles in different situations. They are aware of how their words and actions affect others. They know when it is appropriate to compete and when it is appropriate to co-operate. By working effectively together, they can come up with new approaches, ideas, and ways of thinking.

Managing self This competency is associated with self-motivation, a “can-do” attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners. It is integral to self-assessment.

Students who manage themselves are enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently.

Each influences the principles of restorative practice, enhances teaching and learning thereby improving curriculum delivery, pedagogical processes and learner engagement.

The Values in the revised NZ Curriculum also underpin and authenticate restorative practices as a compassionate and accountable model for building relationships and a state of social justice, most notably those that refer to equity, integrity and respect. As with the key competencies, the values are each intrinsically linked.

For reference the values as stated in the New Zealand Curriculum 2010 are:

excellence, by aiming high and by persevering in the face of difficulties

innovation, inquiry, and curiosity, by thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively

diversity, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages

equity, through fairness and social justice

community and participation for the common good

ecological sustainability, which includes care for the environment

integrity, which involves being honest, responsible, and accountable and acting ethically

and to **respect** themselves, others, and human rights.

These are interwoven in policy, procedures and planning. They are represented in posters around the school, student and teacher self reflections, reporting to parents, celebrations of school events to name some ways each is given paramount importance in all that is considered important. Making the key competencies the focus of all that is important, including assessment will strengthen the restorative culture in our learning environment.

Developments in neuroscience are leading to greater understandings about the relationship between emotion and learning (Claxton, p98). When disconnectedness in relationships create emotions of anxiety, anger, distress, shame or fear the capability for learning is diminished until the relationship is repaired.

The school's most recent Education Review Office report encourages a greater inclusion of Maori perspectives in all dimensions of school life.

The directive is supported by the schooling sector priority that Maori achieve success as Maori. To enable success, cultural identity must be valued and respected in its entirety.

“Maori have recognised restorative justice principles for hundreds of years. Traditionally the marae was a place where all parties affected by an offence could be heard, helping to heal the victim, whanau and offenders” www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/court-referred+restorative+justice. Matt Robson

‘As a nation that speaks of inclusion, social justice, and equity for all, it is worth our considering what these concepts might actually mean for Maori in terms of how Maori knowledge has been acknowledged throughout history. Maori knowledge, beliefs, and understandings are still regularly relegated to the margins, perceived as inferior and lacking in any real substance, or simply dismissed (Berryman and Bateman, 2008).

Restorative practice is compatible with the way Maori prefer to address wrongdoing. The sustained use of restorative practices respects this preference and develops understandings about the way Maori resolve conflict. When cultural preferences are recognised and part of the ‘way it is’ we are building a strong bicultural nation. Maori people can retain their mana if wrongdoing and conflict are resolved in a culturally appropriate way and more likely to achieve educational success through kotahitanga. With twenty percent of students at Opoho School identifying as Maori this is an important consideration.

What is restorative justice or restorative practice? Simply stated... it is a means to respond to wrongdoing. In detail...

‘Restorative justice is a participatory and democratic justice that focuses on the community defined by the incident and not just the wrongdoer. It is an approach to harmful behaviour and community conflict that sees wrongdoing as essentially a violation of people and relationship. The Community Conference, the most formal of the restorative process, brings together those responsible for and those most affected by a serious incident of wrongdoing. Individually and collectively people address the causes or harm, the impact of the harm on those affected and investigate ways to make amends and minimise the risk of future wrongdoing. Thorsborne and Vinegrad (2002, p7 & 8).

Restorative justice emphasizes the importance of participation by those who have a direct stake in the event or offense – that is, those who are involved, impacted by, or otherwise have some legitimate interest in the offense. Restorative justice encourages outcomes that promote responsibility, reparation, and healing for all. Zehr, H. (2002, pp26 & 32).

Rooted in Native Aboriginal communities and the Mennonite communities of the 1970’s, restorative practice works on the principle that is it best to do things “with” people rather than “to” them. Engaging people in fair process and responding to behaviours in a way that involves repairing and strengthening relationships is pivotal to inclusive communities and social justice (Mike O’Neill, 2011 ICP Toronto).

In my view, restorative justice is not a map, an alternative to discipline or punishment, or a politically correct method of problem solving – it is a set of principles that builds a sense of community and citizenship providing people with a sense of belonging and affirmation. A constructive and range of consistent processes, from informal affective statements, empathetic questioning, to classroom circles and formal restorative conferences, to attend to wrongdoing is an inclusive concept within a restorative culture – it is a way of being.

'Intrinsically, schools are social places and learning is a social process. Students do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the support of their families. Emotions can facilitate or hamper their learning and their ultimate success in school' (Zins et al. 2004 as quoted in Peta Blood, 2004)

The Opoho School vision includes being a place where we believe in the 3 R's – Respect for Self, Respect for Others & Respect for the Environment. Values are modeled, explored and encouraged in all aspects of our school community. Values are embedded in our Code of Conduct, and integrated through all learning programmes. This overarching philosophy provides the direction for an even more restorative community than exists at present.

Extensive reading, practical professional learning opportunities and conversations with experts and colleagues have confirmed the importance, powerfulness and place of circle time for establishing inclusive relationships and a restorative culture.

Some teachers at Opoho School use circle time, and all use circle rituals either on a regular or irregular basis.

Jenny Mosley (1998), differentiates between circle time and circle rituals with the latter being generally briefer than circle time. Circle rituals can be used for various information sharing situations, as a time to calm, a time to offer a perspective on a matter to mention a few.

"Circle time is a listening system for enhancing children's self esteem, promoting social values, building a sense of team and developing social skills" (1996, p33). Jenny Mosley also believes that the structure of circle time and its principles contribute significantly to creating a respectful and caring ethos and provides effective and efficient systems to support educators.

The philosophy and principles of circle time are a means to enhance relationships and provides democratic processes that empower individuals and groups and underpins a recommended future direction for Opoho School.

Circle time as a social construct offers a framework, including agreed rules. An introductory phase is generally fun and acts as a warm up before the middle phase that is the 'open forum' component of circle time. The middle phase is a mechanism for developing a belief in the ability for participants to make responsible choices and decisions.

Research by Burns, *'Self Concept Development and Education'* (1982) as quoted in 'Quality Circle Time' by J Mosley, proved that if students are offered respectful relationships and a warm supportive ethos then social and academic performance will flourish. Circle time gives time to watch, listen and reflect for both adults and children, compatible with social learning theory. It provides a learning forum for children to develop specific skills of *'how to..'* watch, listen and reflect facilitated by the teacher and others involved in the process – an optimum collaborative learning environment.

Alternative empowering strategies to some of the incentives promoted by Jenny Mosley (p40-44) are advocated for Opoho School instead of the tangible rewards outlined in 'Quality Circle Time'. Aspects of these rituals are in conflict with the intrinsic motivation ethos encouraged in the school by the principal. The intention of extrinsic rewards may seem innocuous yet there is evidence to suggest that *"rewards are not conducive to developing and maintaining the positive relationships that promote optimal learning or performance"* (Alfie Kohn, p55). By using carefully chosen words as feedback about one's behaviour offers an individual an insight about the impact of his/her actions for self and on

others thereby developing a sense of personal achievement and acknowledgement in relation to living in a respectful and collaborative, caring environment.

It will be likely that some individuals need to be taught how to be in tune with innate feelings of contentment, pride and confidence having 'done what is right' for self and others. Intrinsic motivation, according to some research, a powerful indicator of how successful someone will learn, and how good a job someone will do in the workplace (Kohn, p69).

"The more pupils understand their emotions, the less likely they are to feel disaffected from the learning process" (The Successful Partnership – Turn-a-Round Circle Time).

In a school visited to observe and discuss the power and potential of regular circle time to promote social skills and emotional intelligence, it was recognised that extrinsic rewards were *"what worked for our kids"* (Smith, D personal communication, September, 2011). The awards system advocated by Jenny Mosley and used by the school is considered to have been a useful tool within the whole process of bringing about a more harmonious school community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the tangible rewards are becoming less important to the children and a deliberate and strategic plan to move to fostering intrinsic motivation is an integral feature of the school's long-term goals. Circle Time has been introduced in the school as part of the positive psychology initiative commenced in 2007 by the school as a member of a cluster of geographically defined primary and intermediate schools. After two years, the difference in the 'tone' of the relationships within the school is evident which has included neighbours of the school offering positive feedback to the principal. Fewer incidents of disrespectful behaviour at playtimes and more focused learning affirm the whole-school implementation of circle time. "One of the best things about it is as a tool to give children a voice" (principal & classroom teacher, personal conversations, September 2011).

Implications:

Professional learning for teaching and support staff, learning and information sharing opportunities for families and some recommended changes to current practice aim to strengthen a restorative culture for our school community.

The merits of circle time will be promoted including professional learning for staff to ensure discussion and debate to establish school-wide implementation;

The 'restorative chat' cards will be updated to the more comprehensive sequence of questions for wrongdoer and victim;

Colourful, child-friendly posters outlining the process will be created for all learning spaces;

In-role scenarios for staff will provide practise in using the updated 'restorative chat' cards to provide a greater understanding of the process;

An analysis of predominant concerning and unacceptable behaviours at Opoho School will be classified as minor, moderate, high or major. Recommended processes will form an agreed consistent approach for the range of 'restorative' encounters (in response to the classifications). Record keeping will be maintained to determine effectiveness.

The Opoho School vision and related documents will be reviewed, including the guidelines associated with the Code of Conduct to ensure the ethos of restorative practice is embedded for practical application;

Purchase resources for all staff members e.g. *Quality Circle Time in the Primary Classroom* by Jenny Mosley and *Restorative Practices in Classrooms: Rethinking Behaviour Management* by Thorsborne & Vinegrad

Provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn more about the principles of restorative practice;

Review induction documentation and practices to better reflect restorative practices for staff and families beginning at Opoho School;

Establish training for those staff who work beyond the classroom e.g. After School & Holiday Care personnel to ensure a consistent restorative culture prevails as much as possible in facilities closely associated with Opoho School;

Conclusion:

Our school team is fully committed to building a culture of positive relationships, connectedness and inclusiveness, where all involved are encouraged to contribute, to take and accept responsibility for their own actions and to make amends when things go wrong or one makes a mistake. This can be enhanced by further professional learning about restorative practice, implementing circle time and always being the best we can be in accordance with these principles.

Implementing amended 'restorative' processes will not necessarily bring about an immediate change or always result in the intended ideal outcome between participants. It will be important to remain committed to the changes and encouraged by our, and the successes of other schools and experts.

Bill Hubbard encourages "*....that even when it appears as though students do not benefit immediately from the circles concept, they are probably assimilating valuable learning that is difficult to quantify....*". The same counsel will apply to the range of restorative processes we will strengthen or implement.

Ted Wachtel also encouraged perseverance when implementing change to a restorative model of practice as it is "*naïve to think that a single restorative intervention can change the mindset...*" of particular individuals whose unacceptable behaviours have demonstrated social permissiveness and retribution experiences traditionally been punitive. Advocate and expert Marg Thorsborne cautions that Restorative Practice is not a panacea that will fix everything, nor a substitute for therapy. Within a strongly restorative community there will always be the need for other interventions that provide mental health support for those in need. With this in mind Opoho School will continue to advocate a range of support processes to ensure individual needs are identified and met within a strongly restorative framework.

The Ministry of Justice research that found a 20% decrease in levels of re-offending amongst offenders who took part in restorative justice conferences and upcoming research shows high levels of satisfaction amongst victims who participated in the restorative justice process. This is testimony that as a means to create more harmonious communities where individuals are held accountable for their actions and are involved in collaboratively seeking ways to make amends with and for the victims of the wrongdoing is worthy of our attention. Our aim is that children attending Opoho School are not involved in offending of any sort, let alone of a serious nature, however as humans with the

propensity for social interaction, some may from time to time be part of 'wrong-doing' in some form. Some are likely to behave in a way that causes disconnections within social relationships.

Each needs to be a compassionate, caring global citizen conversant with optimum ways of being respectful, caring, confident individuals and understand ways of supporting others to be likewise. Wrong-doing and causing harm are not limited to criminal offending and all individuals need to understand and be committed to restorative practices as 'a way of being' for individuals and communities to remain connected, responsible and accountable.

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Wachtel, T (1999) *Restorative Justice in Everyday Life: Beyond the Formal Ritual*

Other resources:

2011 ICP Conference Toronto – Keynote addresses by Dr Stephen Lewis & Dr Jennifer James

O'Neill M. Break-out session (ICP Conference 2011) including printed material provided 'Significant Learning Through Significant Relationships: Building a Restorative School'

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