

An investigation into the provision of specific programmes to enhance student well-being and social skills, with a particular focus on Māori students.

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Purposes:

- The well-being of some of our young people is fragile therefore we need programmes to address this so that these young people can achieve their potential.
- There is a specific programme (MHF Mindfulness in Schools) that teaches emotional self-regulation, resilience, focus and concentration.
- Teachers are the key person in the child's life and through effective relationships they can develop the child's skills and strategies to deal with challenges (present and future).
- Investigate if Restorative Practices achieves better outcomes for all those involved.
- The model of Hauora in the NZ Curriculum (Health p 22) may be an approach that best supports all students, especially Maori.

Acknowledgements:

With great appreciation I thank the Riversdale Board of Trustees for approving this sabbatical.

Enormous thanks goes to Dianne, Rachel and Nic (the leadership team) and to the staff of Riversdale School for supporting my leave.

I appreciate the support from the principal and school leader colleagues at Merivale School, Westmere School, Dominion Road School and Waioatahe Valley School who were willing to share their professional knowledge and practices and to engage in professional discussions about the impact of mindfulness and restorative practices on the students and teachers in their schools.

My thanks also to Grant Rix (Mental Health Foundation) and Esther Wing See Graham (Thesis 'Pause, Breathe and Smile') who gave their time to discuss the research findings from the trial of the *MHF Mindfulness in Schools Programme*.

To the facilitator, Katie O'Connor, I extend heartfelt thanks for sharing her professional knowledge and research knowledge about the impact and implementation of mindfulness programmes, and walking many miles whilst the dialogue was occurring.

I thank Joss O'Connor for allowing me to fill the very last spot in the Restorative Practices in Schools training.

Thank you to the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Education Institute who support the provision of Sabbaticals. The value of this in allowing me some uninterrupted 'think' time to replenish my body and mind, along with refreshing myself prior to re-entering the role as principal has been significant.

Purpose:

The purpose of my sabbatical was to look at student well-being and investigate a relatively new to New Zealand programme (Mental Health Foundation's Mindfulness in Schools Programme) and a successful programme (Restorative Practices) to see what impact these programmes had on this. I also wanted to see how the Draft Well Being Indicators aligned with, and supported, both of these programmes. I wondered if Restorative Practices would complement the MHF programme. A number of Maori children in our school display inconsistent behaviour so these programmes may impact on positive outcomes for them.

Background and Rationale:

I have been Principal at Riversdale School for the past 15 years. During this time I have seen multiple changes in education and the direction it has taken. Most recently has been the focus on student well-being as evidenced in the Education Review Office Wellbeing for Success, Draft Evaluation Indicators for Student Wellbeing (Draft 2013) and the published report Well-being for Children's Success at Primary School, February 2015. This report identifies that Years 7 and 8 were particularly important years in terms of wellbeing... Riversdale School is a full primary school and so this has relevance for us.

Also observed have been the changes in children at school. It seems to me that teachers are being presented with children with much higher levels of stress, busier lives, less resilience, fewer skills around emotional self-regulation and limited concentration spans. 'More and more New Zealand children are being prescribed medication for anxiety disorders. Ministry of Health figures for 2010-2013 show a 28 percent increase in antidepressants (a common treatment for anxiety) prescribed in children up to the age of 17. Nixon, p18. In April 2012 Prime Minister John Key launched the Youth Mental Health Project as a means of addressing these concerns.

When discussing the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme with the facilitator it seemed that much of what I was observing could possibly be addressed by the implementation of this programme. Additionally Restorative Practices would support those children that did not act in accordance with our school values of Respect, Responsibility and Honesty to 'make good'.

At the same time much of what I was reading was USA based, where mindful practices had been part of many school curriculums for some time. Also there was information coming out from Australia and the UK about similar programmes. Most recently from the U.K. is information as noted below:

Schools Minister David Laws said evidence suggested the sessions could help boost pupils' attitudes and motivation. 'Anthony Seldon said a 'daily stillness period' would

help improve children's concentration and reduce levels of anxiety and depression. He has championed the practice at his school, Wellington College, in Berkshire. 'It is the most simple and natural technique to learn ... It is all about being yourself, making the most of yourself, and making the most of the opportunities that life presents to you. It promotes trusting relationships, healthy living and psychological and emotional security.' Now ministers have disclosed they believe mindfulness techniques 'certainly merit consideration' and education minister Liz Truss has been actively looking into the practice... ' Extract from an article from the Mail Online, Tuesday, Jul 7th 2015.

In her article *Wellness: A Conceptual Framework for School-based Mindfulness Programs*, Albrecht concluded that using wellness as a framework to guide our comprehension of school-based mindfulness practice and research. It was seen that mindfulness programs target a wide range of wellness outcomes... Further research and discussion is required to determine whether wellness can act as a suitable platform to enhance and integrate mindfulness practice and research. (p. 31).

Around this time the Health Promoting Schools magazine published in July 2014 outlined the Relax Kids programme (British based) that was being trialled at Tainui School which has very similar learning intentions as the Mindfulness in Schools programme.

As a consequence of my reading, and what I was learning from various sources, it seemed a possibility that the MHF Mindfulness in Schools could also link to support the Well-being Indicators and be a specific programme that developed a range of skills in children. We often tell children to 'pay attention' or to 'concentrate' or to 'calm down' but we don't specifically teach strategies to children so that they have a tool-kit to do this.

The realisation that our punitive approach to behaviour management was not creating change in children. The same children were in trouble the next day or next week. Therefore there had to be a more effective approach to help them realise that there were consequences for their behaviour as this behaviour impacted on many others. An investigation of Restorative Practices could be a more effective way of managing student behaviour, and achieve better outcomes for everyone concerned.

Areas of Investigation and Methodology

- Reading the Wellbeing for Success: Draft Evaluation Indicators for Student Wellbeing (Draft) 2013.
- School visit to hear about the long term impact of the Restorative Practices in Schools programme on school culture, the students and the wider community.
- Attendance at Restorative Practices in Schools three day facilitator training with Margaret Thorsborne at Rangiora 17-19 March, 2015.
- Restorative Practice readings.
- Participation in the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme to give a 'felt' sense of mindful practices.
- School visits to investigate the impact of the *MHF Mindfulness in Schools* pilot programme
- Readings about health and wellness.

- Plan for the introduction of Restorative Practices and Mindfulness in Schools programmes at Riversdale School.
- Discuss and debate with other professionals approaches to behaviour management, the wellbeing of students and how teachers support this, how to develop resilience, manage stress, develop empathy and strategies for managing emotions.

Findings

- The programme has been highly successful in our school. As at the end of Term 2, 2015 we had completed the 8 week programme with the facilitator. Results from the emotional safety survey report that a majority of children know that they can use this as a strategy to support them in 'tough times'.
- Great success in the schools visited with the trial of the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme. Children and teachers reported significant gains in emotional self-regulation. Children reported the strategies that they were able to use when feeling stressed or anxious, and the knowledge that all feelings pass. They used these strategies in a variety of situations both at home and in their school lives.
- Teachers were fully supportive of the programme as were parents in each of the school communities visited. There had been no parent reaction to the introduction other than support. It was reported that only one parent had chosen to have their child not participate in the MHF Mindfulness in Schools trial programme across the three schools visited.
- *Mental Health Foundation 2013 pilot research with AUT showed our Mindfulness in Schools Programme:*
 - *increased calmness*
 - *improved focus and attention*
 - *enhanced self-awareness*
 - *helped with conflict resolution and the development of positive relationships*
 - *reduced stress.*
 - *amazingly, many of these findings were observed in both students and teachers.*
- The results of the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme trial at Westmere School as noted here. *Summary of the mindfulness and children's wellbeing study at Westmere School. Conducted by the Mental Health Foundation, AUT University, and the University of Auckland, 2014.*
Conclusion:
Results from this study indicate that the Mental Health Foundation's mindfulness programme has a number of observable benefits:
 - *short-term improvements in children's general and emotional wellbeing*
 - *potential long-term benefits for wellbeing*

- *long-term improvements in mindfulness*

The demonstrated improvements in mindfulness as well as general and emotional wellbeing may also indicate other potential benefits of the programme (e.g., psychological resilience, self-esteem). However, further research is needed to explore these potential benefits.

*For further information on this study, please contact Dr Daniel Devcich:
d.devcich@auckland.ac.nz*

- *Summary of the mindfulness and children's wellbeing study Conducted by the Mental Health Foundation, AUT University and the University of Auckland 2014 Conclusion*

Results suggest that the mindfulness programme may lead to short-term improvements in children's wellbeing and may help children to become more mindful over time.

Data from teacher observations and interviews with children suggested that the programme may improve children's social and emotional skills, which might lead to greater wellbeing.

In summary, this study confirmed the results of the pilot study.

*For further information on this study, please contact Dr Ross Bernay:
ross.bernay@aut.ac.nz.*

Conclusions:

- There are clear benefits for many children from the programme. They are able to articulate their learning and use it in school situations.
- Early on in the programme implementation a teacher reported: *"I observed one child come into the classroom one lunchtime, sit at his desk and say that he just needed to do some belly breathing to calm down."* Previously this child would have ended up in a playground dispute.
- All of the research read supports the implementation of Mindful practices. It may not impact on some students in the short term, but could in their future. Most parents and the Board of Trustees agree with this philosophy... *"if it helps even one child, teen or adult from making a wrong choice then it has been worthwhile..."*
- The Restorative Practices programme would complement the Mindfulness in Schools programme well because of the reflective aspect and the need to take responsibility for our own actions.
- *"Human beings are happier more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them."* (Watchel, 2012).
- *"Increasingly schools are finding restorative practices more effective in establishing long term lasting changes in relationships, more connecting of a school community, more involving and hearing of victims, and more enhancing of climates of care within schools as a whole."* (www.restorativeschools.org.nz Jansen and Matla, 2013).

- The dimensions of taha wairua, taha hinengaro, taha tinana, and taha whanau each influence and support the others. The practices in the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme and the Restorative Practices also have this holistic approach to wellbeing or hauora. These align with many of the Wellbeing for Success indicators.

Future Actions:

- Create a restorative environment at Riversdale School and with the support of the parents and caregivers of the school community.
- Plan for the introduction of Restorative Practices in Term 4, 2015 or early 2016.
- Planning for work with the teaching team on linking the development of restorative practices and mindfulness strategies and outcomes to the Wellbeing for Success indicators to the school's vision, values and charter.
- Given that the New Zealand Curriculum's vision statement is that children become confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners (MOE 2007), it is important that schools implement programmes to develop these skills in children. The information studied in this sabbatical allows me to be optimistic that the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme can assist children with this vision.
- In the foreword of the Wellbeing For Success Draft Evaluation Indicators, the Chief Review Officer (Acting) states that "Schools have an ethical, professional and legal responsibility to ensure that their practices promote the wellbeing of all students". Section 5 in this document outlines the perspectives on the desired outcomes for student wellbeing (p 18). A number of these indicators were incorporated into this schools annual emotional safety survey and most students who had participated in the MHF Mindfulness in Schools programme reported that the skills and strategies learned in this contributed positively to their feelings of belonging, achievement, resilience, and social and emotional competence.

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