

Primary Principals Sabbatical Leave

Sabbatical Report

Developing a Positive Quality School

Looking at Four William Glasser Quality Schools In Adelaide

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CONTENTS	PAGE
Introduction	3
Background Information	5
Activities	6
Findings	8
Conclusions	12
Bibliography	14
Appendices	15

Introduction

For many years I have been interested in the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy when working with unhappy or disconnected students. I believe that this is the only successful approach to changing human behaviour. As a principal of a multicultural primary school, I practice “Lead Management” (rather than a “Boss Management”) and have coached teachers to use Lead Management approaches. Experience has showed me that punishment and coercion do not work and that the only people that can change their behaviours are themselves. William Glasser’s “Choice Theory and Reality Therapy” support these approaches.

I have trained in Glasser Choice Theory, completing my Basic Week and an Advanced Week. I am presently working towards the final stage of certification. Last year I was elected President of the New Zealand Glasser Institute. Over the last few years I have ensured all staff has received at least the Basic Week training and I have hosted courses for other schools. I have also worked as a consultant in some New Zealand schools, assisting them with behaviour management and developing a positive school culture. In 2004 Wilford School was used as an example of “best practice” by the Ministry of Social Development publication on “Developing a Positive School Culture.”

Using and implementing Choice Theory is an exciting and successful ongoing journey at Wilford School. I was keen to find out what other schools outside New Zealand were doing so I can build on our strategies and models. Adelaide has many schools that have adopted Choice Theory as an approach to building a positive, quality school culture and develop self managing, caring resilient students.

Purpose:

- *To increase my knowledge and experience of how some Adelaide schools are using “William Glasser Choice Theory and Reality Therapy” and other cognitive behaviour models to develop self managing students, independent learners and create a positive school culture.*
- *To identify the changes in school culture and behaviour management that have lead to improved learning outcomes for students.*

The Research Questions

1. What was the school culture prior to introducing Choice Theory and Reality Therapy?
2. What change process and strategies did you use?
3. What or who most influenced the change?
4. What were the key areas of change?
5. What influence did the introduction of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy have on staff?
6. What influence did Choice Therapy and Reality Therapy have on student behaviour and achievement?
7. How are the Board and community involved?
8. What are the challenges for the future?

The four schools I visited were all urban schools and ranged from high middle to low middle socio-economic communities. They ranged in size from 150 to 800 students. Although some Adelaide state schools are using Choice Theory and Reality Therapy, most Catholic Schools have been encouraged to use this approach and training has been funded by the Catholic Education Office (CEO)

I also met with the President of Australia William Glasser Institute.

Background

Over the last nine years, Wilford School has developed a successful behaviour management and quality learning programme based on William Glasser's Choice Theory and Reality Therapy. This approach is continually developing and improving. We use Choice Theory as a foundation to build a "Quality Learning School." Choice Theory underpins other teaching and learning approaches such as Guy Claxton's "Building Learning Power" and "Inquiry Learning." Through teachers modelling the behaviours they expect from students and empowering students to solve their own problems and make their own choices, they build trusting, open relationships with all students.

Wilford School is a decile 6 school of 300 students. It is a full primary, is multicultural, and has a Maori Immersion Unit. Everything we do is underpinned by Choice Theory and Reality Therapy.

Choice Theory is an approach that allows us to understand our own behaviours as well as the behaviours of others. It is about internal control and personal responsibility. It maintains that all we do is behave and that our behaviour is driven by our desire to satisfy one or more of our five basic needs. The basic needs are: love and belonging, power, freedom, fun and survival. The approach maintains that almost all behaviour is chosen and purposeful and that total behaviour is made up of four components: acting, thinking, feeling and physiology. However we only have control over thinking and acting. If we change the way we think and act, our physiology and feelings may also change. Connecting habits bring us closer together in our relationships and therefore help solve problems. Disconnecting habits drive relationships further apart and so the problem grows.

Reality Therapy is a process of interacting which helps teach people to understand their own behaviour and self-evaluate in a more conscious way, so that they take more effective control of their lives and get what they want in a more responsible way.

As a result of everyone in the school using Choice Theory and Reality Therapy, we have self managing children and adults. Self managing children make healthy choices that are appropriate to their age and development. They grow in understanding human behaviour and learn how to meet their basic needs in a responsible way. They develop life skills and learn to work happily with others by building healthy relationships. Self managing children understand that some choices are limited and they accept responsibility for the choices they make. Self managing children are flexible, resilient and happy in the knowledge that they can create the life they want to have and be the person they want to be.

The criteria Wilford School has developed to create a "Quality, Safe School" are:

- Relationships are based on trust and respect
- All staff and students use Choice Theory and eliminate the need to control one another
- There is measurable continuous improvement through concurrent and self evaluation

- All students are striving to be quality, powerful learners and can demonstrate continuous improvement
- School is a joyful place to be where fun and personal satisfaction in producing quality work and self management is the generic reward for learning.

Activities undertaken (Methodology)

I visited four Catholic schools in urban Adelaide and met with the President of the Australian William Glasser Institute. I interviewed the principal and the staff member responsible for student management. I talked to teachers and students. I visited classrooms and observed in playgrounds.

Each school was very different and had implemented Choice Theory to varying degrees. Three schools had every teacher teaching Choice Theory on a regular basis.

All schools were extremely well resourced compared to the majority of New Zealand schools. The schools had large open plan classrooms where 2 or 3 classes of the same year group worked in an open plan space. Each year group also had a “spill over room” where teachers could work with small groups or individuals and give presentations to the whole cohort. Schools had music rooms, art rooms, Italian rooms large libraries and computer suites. Each classroom had 8 to 10 computers and several interactive whiteboards. Some schools had canteens and halls. Every school had a special room set aside as the Glasser “**Connecting Room.**” This was a room where students could go for self reflection and counselling. Some schools had a counsellor in this room during school time, others called on teachers, the counsellor, or the principal when needed. All schools employed either a full time or some part-time school counsellor.

School Profile: Small school, 160 students, six teachers. Students from low to low/middle socio-economic backgrounds. Multicultural. Principal fairly new. Teacher designated as “Student Wellbeing Teacher.” This teacher drives the school development in Choice Theory, supported by the principal. The principal is well qualified in Choice Theory but feels she still has to work hard on “walking the talk.” The school has recently expanded their playground and has a new administration area.

School B

School Profile: This school has recently amalgamated three primary schools, a pre-school and a secondary school. There were 1,000 primary school students. Two of the previous primary schools were using Choice Theory as an approach for student management. The school counsellor from one of these schools has become a full time school counsellor and staff trainer for the primary section of the school. She drives the Choice Theory development in the school. The staff development in the use of Choice Theory was in the early stages due to the recent changes in the structure of the school. The time of my visit there were two primary school principals. One was on leave and the other who was not trained in Choice Theory, delegated the responsibility of dealing with students experiencing problems, to the school counsellor. The school draws its students from a middle class suburb and has some

ESOL students. The school is extremely well resourced with new buildings and landscaping.

School C

School Profile: The school is a large regional school which services several middle class suburbs. The principal has been in the school for six years and is trained in Choice Theory. The principal and School Counsellor both drive the school culture which is totally based on Choice Theory. Choice Theory and Reality Therapy is extremely well developed in all classes and implicit in the school culture.

School D

School Profile: The school has 330 students and draws students from low to middle socio-economic areas. There are some ESOL students. They have a new principal who has been there for six months. The Choice Theory programme is driven by the administrative officer who has qualifications in counselling and Choice Theory. The principal is very supportive and intends to up skill himself in Choice Theory. He had not had any formal; training.

Findings

1. School Culture Prior to Implementation of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy.

All schools said that the previous culture had been based on external control and punishment. There was a blame culture where teachers blamed students and families for their behaviours. Often students displaying inappropriate behaviours were sent to a senior staff member for discipline. Students were not self managing. Most teachers and principal's were "Boss Leaders" instead of "Lead Managers." Many teachers did not work on forming positive relationships with students. Teachers who had trained in Choice Theory worked in isolation with their own classes.

2. The Change Processes and Strategies Used.

There were different approaches used in each school. There was recognition in all schools that **all** staff needed to change, including support staff. Some schools started with a whole school staff meeting or workshop, other schools started by training some staff in a Glasser Basic Week, and then continued to offer the basic week to a few staff at a time. The newly amalgamated school employed an outside trainer to take a staff meeting with all staff. That school also got the counsellor to take one 20 minute class lesson a week in every classroom. Initially the teachers left the room while this was happening, but now they are required to stay and observe.

Introductory meetings were followed by regular staff meetings where policy was agreed upon, school specific resources were made, and development plans were designed. Issues were debated; resolved and key practices were adopted.

New staff were inducted by training them in the basic week. In some schools this was done early in the induction process and in others a few new teachers were trained each year. Schools held regular staff meetings on Choice theory where experienced teachers shared their ideas. Several new teachers said that they learnt about choice theory by following the role models provided by other staff members. All schools agreed that the training and induction of new staff is a slow process and that for it to be successful each staff member needs to take ownership of the process. The commitment to self change varied hugely amongst staff and was not related to the amount of training they had had. Some staff members found it easier than others as they used choice theory naturally in their own lives and in relationships with others.

3. People Who Influenced Change.

In all schools the principal strongly supported the school development and culture, but there usually there was a designation person employed to lead the staff development and to work closely and directly with the students. In one school the school counsellor was the sole person driving the development. In another school where the Choice Theory culture was strong, the principal had a key role in driving the development, in partnership with the counsellor. Several school counsellors said that it was the president of the William Glasser Institute of Australia that initially enthused and motivated the staff.

All schools used qualified outside trainers for staff meetings and basic weeks. Some specific trainers were highly thought of by all schools.

4. The Key Areas of Change in School Culture Included:

- Working with a trained facilitator rather than their own staff
- Staff understanding **they had to change**, not the students
- Developing positive, trusting relationships with the students
- Empowerment of staff and students
- Self evaluation
- Quality work from students
- Elimination of external rewards
- Students being taught how to be more self managing
- Everyone working together and supporting each other
- Developing a fun, positive school culture
- Shared decision making
- Developing a Quality School together; defining what this would look like
- Ensuring that students are happy and that they have the skills to solve their own problems
- Students accepting “natural consequences.”

5. The Influence of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy had on Staff was:

- The school became a very different place, much calmer and more positive
- There were different conversations in the staffroom. Negative labelling of students disappeared
- Teachers enjoyed teaching and were less stressed
- Staff shared ideas more readily
- Staff were really supportive of each other
- Teachers were not confrontational
- Staff became life long learners and always strove for excellence
- Choice Theory had influenced their personal lives

6. The Influence of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy on Students

- Learning has become part of their quality world
- They know what quality work looks like and they strive for quality
- Has had a positive effect on autistic students. They learnt to express feeling and form relationships.
- Students feel safe and happy and want to be at school
- “Significant students” are no longer identified as “problem students”
- Behaviour problems disappeared, especially major ones
- Students know how to build relationships with other students
- Students relate to other students differently, they are more supportive and tolerant
- Students accept natural consequences without getting upset or angry
- Students trust their teachers
- Students and teachers use a common language

- Students can express their feelings adequately
- Students are more engaged in learning
- Students self refer if they have a problem
- Students are resilient and better able to manage themselves
- Students are on task and working purposefully
- Students are truthful and take responsibility for their choices and actions
- Students have learnt how to negotiate
- Students have developed life skills
- Students are more mature
- Students have a better understanding of themselves and who they want to be.

7. Community and Board Involvement

All schools said that their boards and communities supported the Choice Theory approach. One school runs induction courses on Choice Theory for parents of five year olds, prior to them starting school. Another school has a special brochure on Choice Theory, for all new families. Because the Catholic Education Office (CEO) promotes and funds training in Choice Theory, all catholic schools are expected to use this model to develop school culture and manage students. Several schools said they needed to hold more parent training and information sessions.

8. Challenges and Future Development Plans

Staff as Models

The main challenge for all schools was getting “buy in” from **all** staff and for staff to “walk the talk.” Some principal’s said that they found it more difficult to model the approach than their designated Choice Theory teachers. They all said that some people embraced the approach naturally while others found it conflicted with their personal approach to life, so found it more difficult to teach and model. Training was no indicator of level of practice. Principals and counsellors accepted that schools were always going to have staff that were at different levels of development and that some staff members would find it harder to change than others. The school counsellors and student welfare leaders said they needed to work with teachers who were not practicing Choice Theory themselves. Some wanted to give staff more readings and have discussions on the readings. Time to do this was a factor.

The greatest barriers to whole school success were:

- Some of the most qualified staff still don’t walk the talk
- Some staff behave as “Boss Managers.”
- Some staff do not model Choice Theory all the time

School Leadership

All the school counsellors or “student welfare” staff said that it was essential that the school’s principal at least supported the practices and preferably also co-managed the development.

Staff Training

All schools believed that staff (including support staff) should undertake at least the “Basic Week” training. For some schools this had to be done over a period of time, as a Basic Week was only offered once a year. Three out of the four schools thought they needed more staff training and that this was a challenge with all the other development they had to do. One school would like to visit other schools such as “Sunshine School” in Brisbane.

All school believed that training took a long time and that it should not be rushed.

The Connecting Room

All schools said it was essential to have a “Connecting Room.” (Appendix 1) Finding the right place and size for a connecting room was a challenge for two schools. Some schools also has designated outside seats students could sit on if they needed a safe, quiet place to reflect. One school said they needed to provide this.

Documentation

All schools agreed that they need to have “Choice Theory” documents and charts evident in every classroom and around the school. Schools were at various stages in producing documents for the students and the community. In one school every classroom had many displays and charts which the students used on a daily basis. Display space was an issue for one school as teachers were not allowed to put displays up on the walls of the new classrooms. There were insufficient pinboards.

Parent Education

Most schools recognised that they needed to run more parent workshops. Some schools include articles on Choice Theory in parent newsletters.

Conclusions

William Glasser Choice Theory and Reality Therapy is a very successful approach which impacts positively on school culture and student behaviour. None of the schools had formally assessed the impact of Choice Theory on student achievement, however most thought that students were more focused on learning and striving to produce quality work. They were able to work more co-operatively and think more deeply. However they agreed that this is not a 'quick fix' approach to problem solving. It is an approach to life. It requires whole school (and community) commitment, ongoing development and support from the principal and lead managers that "walk the talk." Staff need to change and model the behaviours **before** students are expected to. All staff including office and support staff needed to be trained and support the school culture. To implement this approach throughout the school may take some time. It may take three years or more before the behaviours of staff and students become embedded dispositions. For the model to work, staff need to **want** to adopt the model without coercion or pressure. Staff will always be at different stages of development. Principals believed that the approach sells itself as it is needs satisfying for students and staff. In schools where Choice Theory is being practiced, staff and students were having fun, solving problems quickly and peacefully, getting their needs met in positive ways, demonstrating strong, trusting relationships and experiencing intrinsic reward for quality learning.

The Critical Areas of Change for Management and Staff:

- **THINKING:** A change in the way problems are viewed. Staff accepting that people choose everything they do and the only person that can change their behaviours is themselves
- **RELATIONSHIPS:** Management and staff using connecting, respectful behaviours towards each other, students and parents. Choice Theory is reflected in what they say, what they do, what they think, and how they solve problems. Understanding staff and students' basic needs. Having insight into students' basic needs and Quality World." Staff working to bring relationships closer together rather than pushing them further apart.
- **MODELLING:** Staff not expecting students to do anything they are not doing or saying. Management not expecting teachers to do anything they would not do. Staff reflecting on what they would feel if a student spoke to them in a disconnecting way. Staff reflecting on whether their behaviours match what they accept from students and expect from other staff?
- **POWER BASE:** Giving students more power over themselves and decisions affecting them. Supporting others to solve take responsibility for their actions and solve their own problems. Having faith that everyone can change without external reward or coercion. Not putting a time limit on change.
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Believing that everyone can improve their relationships, learn skills and have understandings that will lead to happy fulfilled lives.

Believing that there is no such thing as a problem child, only children whose basic needs are not being met”.

- **LANGUAGE:** Staff making an effort to change the way they speak to others including students. Always speaking in a positive way. Asking questions rather than making statements. Communicating without using power or coercion. Using connecting language. Not making assumptions.

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(Note: Although some of these books were first published some time ago the content is still relevant)

THE CONNECTING ROOM

The Connecting Room is a place for students that need co-managing in gaining effective control of their lives. It is a place students can go if they need to calm down, manage their emotions or have time to reflect. It can also be used for students who may be finding it difficult to play safely and happily with others.

The Connecting Room is a bright, cheerful child centred room. It will have bean bags or comfy chairs, soft cuddly toys, Choice Theory charts on the walls and Reality Therapy games and cards.

School counsellors, teachers, management staff or even trained senior students can co- manage students who chose to spend time in the Connecting Room. These people engage with the student or students, developing a trusting relationship so that the student can think of more effective solutions to their problems. They help them to take more personal responsibility for their behaviours and choices and to move closer to fulfilling their personal needs in a responsible way.

Students can spend as much time as they need in the Connecting Room. Some who have come to the Connecting Room because of conflict with other students or because they have been disturbing the learning and teaching process, negotiate when they feel they are self-managing well enough to interact respectfully and happily with others. Others may have chosen to spend time in the connecting room because of personal worries or problems they want to discuss with an adult.

In the Connecting Room students learn that **responsibility** is learning to choose behaviours that satisfy their needs but at the same time do not impinge on other's rights to be safe and happy and able to learn. Extrinsic rewards and coercion are never used, as students need to self evaluate so they have the power and freedom to make their own decisions and plans. This ensures they develop confidence, resilience and develop positive, cohesive relationships with themselves and others.

THE CONNECTING AND DISCONNECTING HABITS

Choice Theory contends that whenever people have difficulty with others, they should never use the deadly habits: criticising, blaming, threatening, complaining, punishing, bribing and nagging.

Instead, they should choose only to do what could bring them closer or keep them closer. Doing this is not difficult. In fact, whenever they have problems with their long-term good friends, they do this all the time. They do not use the seven deadly habits because they don't want to lose their friends.

Unfortunately, when people have difficulty with almost anyone else, they immediately put the seven disconnecting habits into practice and make things worse.

The Connecting Habits

Listening

Supporting

Encouraging

Trusting

Negotiating

Respecting

Accepting

Befriending

Caring

Contributing

The Disconnecting Habits

Blaming

Punishing

Criticising

Complaining

Rewarding to Control

Threatening

Nagging

(From "Choice Theory" Glasser, W (2000))

COMPARING BOSS MANAGEMENT WITH LEAD MANAGEMENT

BOSS MANAGEMENT	LEAD MANAGEMENT
Believes s/he is the key motivator	Believes people are internally motivated. Identifies barriers to motivation and discusses support
Imposes own vision on others. Sets tasks and standards	Communicates and shares the school's vision of quality
Does not encourage others to offer ideas	Establishes a quality relationship based on trust. Inspires co-operation, asks for input
Does not compromise. Uses power to reward or punish. Rescues others.	Devotes time and energy to working on supporting others
Defines the work, says do it.	Knows what quality actually is and models it. Listens to staff. Creates consistency of purpose.
Gives the impression that he/she is the expert	Creates a culture where everyone can contribute and all opinions are valued.
Judges and evaluates others. Does not encourage self evaluation.	Encourages critical self evaluation. Models self evaluation.
Sees the job as a list of tasks to complete. Completes tasks to minimum standards	Demonstrates quality outcomes and strives for continuing improvement.
Uses coercion and punishment. Complains about people to others, does not address the problem with the person concerned.	Establishes a warm supportive environment as a leader and facilitator. Asks "how can I help you? What do you need?" Avoids rewards and criticism.
Tells others what, when and how to do their job. Dominates.	Is a team member, listens, negotiates and models.
Is more concerned with their own needs than the needs of the team.	Listens to others and asks what their needs are. Offers to take action on these.
Is quick to disagree. Considers their way is the only way.	Constantly examines his/her leadership approaches and thinks of ways to improve.
Rewards individuals. Is not a team player	Encourages team work and is open to ideas
Blames others when things go wrong	Takes responsibility for errors and learns from them. Is able and willing to change.

Adapted from "The Choice Theory Manager," William Glasser 1994, by Judy Grose 2009.