

**BUILDING A CULTURE OF
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:
THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION
OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN
SCHOOLS**

Sabbatical report on research undertaken in term 3, 2011

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Executive summary

Restorative practices have been widely adopted by New Zealand schools over the last eight to ten years. This research first of all examines the nature of restorative practices in schools, and the philosophy, including values and principles, that underpins it.

Many schools believe that restorative practices are about relationship management and building a positive, inclusive, respectful school culture. They are educative rather than punitive. They help students build important values and life skills. In fact they are strongly in alignment with the intent and vision of the New Zealand Curriculum. There is a strong argument for using restorative practices to assist schools to progress towards this vision.

Restorative practices are constantly evolving, as what was originally a youth justice model is continually adapted and improved to meet the needs of schools and their stakeholders. Best practice in this arena is constantly evolving also, as schools learn from experience and each other, and from the research undertaken by academics. I give a breakdown on current best practice later in the report, based on the literature and visits to six New Zealand schools.

Implementing a major cultural change in a school is a massive undertaking, replete with challenges and multiple demands for school leaders. I also consider the change implementation stories of the schools visited and share insights gathered.

Restorative practices have the power to transform school culture. I certainly believe that this values-based approach is the way of the future, as schools do their best to work towards the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum of producing confident, connected, actively involved citizens who are lifelong learners.

Purpose

I wanted to use the opportunity that the sabbatical provided to achieve three main things:

1. Extend and deepen my understanding of the philosophy that underpins restorative practices.
2. Explore restorative practices in action in various school settings, in the literature and in reality, in order to clarify my understanding of what constitutes best practice in this arena.
3. Review the change implementation stories of a variety of schools as they became restorative schools, and find out the factors that contributed to its successful implementation.

I was particularly interested in how the change to restorative practices can be embedded into school culture, and become part of the fabric of the way schools do things. In other words, I was interested not only in how schools used restorative practices as a behaviour management approach, but also how restorative practices could influence and shape school policies and structures such as school curriculum design and delivery.

Rationale and Background information

Hurunui College has been working with restorative practices for over two years. It seemed to me that restorative practices offered our school not only a solid basis for our approach to managing behaviour and relationships in the school, but also a philosophy and system that was in line with the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum and which could assist with the achievement of that vision.

While I was excited by the possibilities that restorative practices offered our school, I was also worried that its success could be compromised by competing pressures, such as teacher and parent expectations, or other demands for energy and attention, (e.g. National Standards and the realignment of Achievement Standards). I therefore wished to find out what were the enablers in successful implementations of restorative practices, and what factors could derail the process.

Methodology

I identified a number of schools that I wished to visit. I tried to visit a variety of schools from urban to rural, across the decile range, and representative of the sector (primary, intermediate, Y7-13 and Y9-13 schools). Most were recognised as leading schools nationally in terms of restorative practice, while some were working towards that goal. I approached these schools and organised a programme of school visits.

SCHOOLS VISITED

School	Roll	Year Levels	Decile	% Maori	Principal
Bream Bay College	450	7-13	4	41%	Wayne Buckland
Green Bay High School	1150	9-13	8	15%	Morag Hutchinson
Kaiapoi North School	500	1-8	5	15%	Jason Miles
Opotiki College	530	7-13	1	80%	Maurie Abraham
Rotorua Intermediate	670	7-8	4	60%	Garry de Thierry
Waimate High School	370	7-13	4	8%	Janette Packman

I spent the initial two weeks reading through a wide range of articles on restorative practices, which covered topics relevant to my research. I also read a number of articles on the successful implementation of cultural change in schools.

This reading helped shape my thinking in preparation for the school visits. I designed a list of questions which I wanted to discuss with the principals of the schools that I visited. These questions were adapted to suit other staff members in the schools, and students.

I then visited the six schools, spoke with a variety of people involved with restorative practices (principals [4], deputy principals [3], curriculum leaders [5], guidance counsellors [2], RTLB [1] and some students [two focus groups]), and recorded their impressions. I collated the data gathered and analysed it to see how the findings in the literature were reflected in the schools. I was also keen to find useful ideas, insights, and strategies for me to take back to my own school.

Findings

1 RESTORATIVE PRACTICES PHILOSOPHY

1a READINGS: RP PHILOSOPHY

During my sabbatical I read approximately thirty articles on restorative practices and restorative justice, both in the New Zealand context and overseas (Australia, UK, USA, Ireland, Singapore). Some of these articles resonated with me more than others. I record here some key points on restorative practices philosophy from these readings.

WHAT ARE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES?

The first area of interest to report on was the nature of restorative practices themselves. Several writers reported on and/or advocated for taking a larger view of restorative practices [Wachtel (2008), Blood and Thorsborne (2005), Gossen (1996), Mirsky (2003), Drewery and Winslade (2003), Sia (2010)]. Put simply, rather than seeing restorative practices as a strategy to employ when there is a problem in the school (a reactive approach), they embraced a larger view that restorative practices are about establishing a culture of respectful relationships in the school (a proactive approach). Blood and Thorsborne (2005) are categorical:

Restorative practice in schools is much more than conferencing serious misconduct. We are working in a community that has long term and deep relationships between all its members who need to co-exist in a healthy way for learning outcomes to be met. This requires a range of proactive and responsive processes which strengthen relationships and take a relational approach to problem solving. (p17)

Drewery and Winslade (2003) state that for restorative practices “to work, more than just a grafting of a new technology onto existing systems is required. Some shifts in thinking need to take place. The primary shift required for restorative practices to be developed is a shift . . . to an emphasis on relationships in the school community” (p6).

Quoting Bob Costello, director of training for the International Institute for Restorative Practices, Mirsky (2003) reinforces the above point:

Restorative Practices are not new ‘tools for your toolbox’ but represent a fundamental change in the nature of relationships in schools. It is the relationships, not specific strategies, that bring about meaningful change. (p1)

Indeed the mission statement of International Institute for Restorative Practices defines restorative practices as “the science of restoring and developing social capital, social

discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making.”

Wachtel reports on the implementation of restorative practices in a Singapore high school, where the principal states:

It is not about discipline per se, but a whole school philosophy that would trigger off curriculum reform, organizational change and re-culturation of the school (2008, p1).

Sia reports on the work of the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SSCSC) in Alberta, Canada. The SSCSC “offers knowledge and skills for educators, parents, and community helpers to respectfully work with children in a safe, non-coercive environment to help them learn self-discipline and become productive, principled citizens”(2010).

Gossen underlines the educative benefits of the restorative approach:

If we continuously focus on reparation rather than on fault we will become proactive rather than reactive. Restitution is healing for the person who has done wrong, and it has the potential to remedy the wrong for the victim. Moreover, the person who effects the restitution will be stronger than he was before he erred. This is the real power of the process. The person who has erred does not return to a neutral state. He is actually positively impacted by his act of restitution. He is a better person. People cannot change what has been done. People cannot change the past. People can only change what they do next (1996, p46).

Each of these reports takes an enlarged view of restorative practices and underlines its potential for building a culture of positive and respectful relationships in the school between all members of the school community, as well as offering significant other benefits.

RESTORATIVE APPROACHES AND TEACHER AUTHORITY

Restorative practices challenge some of the traditional beliefs about the student teacher relationship, and the nature of teacher power and authority. As Blood and Thorsborne (2005) say:

. . . the introduction of restorative practice challenges deeply held beliefs around notions of discipline and authority. A traditional approach to these concepts focuses on apportioning blame, establishing which rule has been violated and making wrongdoers accountable by punishing them. . . . Most of us grew up with this tradition and have practiced our teaching and behaviour management in

ways which reflect these beliefs, despite holding values about people and relationships which are often in conflict with these practices. (p3)

While the introduction of restorative practices highlights this conflict between teacher values and practice, it can also help schools and teachers resolve it by establishing policy, processes and practices which reflect, and provide approaches to achieve, our stated values about people and relationships, and thus help us align our actions with our values.

In addition, restorative practices ask teachers to move away from the authoritarian approaches that some teachers see as the source of their power in the classroom. In moving from the familiar authoritarian and punitive strategies to the newer approaches which they have less confidence in, it is possible for teachers to come to the belief that restorative practices are a soft approach which is less effective (see Martin and Bin Yusoff, 2007). I believe that having a deep understanding of the philosophy of the restorative approach helps counter this. In fact, when implemented fully and thoroughly, restorative practices are far from soft. While restorative practices have high support, they also have high accountability: they demand high levels of responsibility, honesty and good will from all participants and are much more rigorous in this regard than the traditional punitive approaches. They also have the added advantage of fostering these qualities in our schools.

THE ALIGNMENT OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES PHILOSOPHY WITH *THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM* AND REGISTERED TEACHER CRITERIA

As I explored the philosophy of restorative practices, it became increasingly clear that it was very much in alignment with the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), especially with the vision, values, key competencies and effective pedagogy.

The New Zealand Curriculum represents a significant shift in educational thinking. The learner is now placed firmly at the centre of the curriculum. The vision, values, principles, and key competencies are given equal importance with the skills and knowledge of the curriculum (the content). These changes ask teachers to reconceptualise their role, as teachers of the whole person, rather than simple purveyors of information and trainers in skills. They also ask schools to review their systems and approaches so that they are able to foster the achievement of the vision of the NZC. Where do restorative practices fit in with this fundamental shift?

The vision of the NZC is for our young people to “be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners”. Several of the descriptors that expand each of these aspects of the vision are directly supported by having a restorative approach:

TABLE 1: ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE VISION OF *THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM* AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES.

NZC VISION	RESTORATIVE PRACTICES
Confident	
Positive in their own identity	the inclusiveness of the restorative approach assists the development of a positive identity in students
Motivated and reliable	the restorative approach promotes student engagement and taking responsibility for actions
Resilient	the restorative approach builds resilience by assisting in the development of a community of care in the school, and strategies for dealing with issues
Connected	
Able to relate well to others	the restorative approach has an emphasis on respect and effective communication
Members of communities	the restorative approach enhances community building in schools
Actively involved	
Participants in a range of life contexts	the participatory nature of the restorative approach (doing things <i>with</i> people, rather than <i>to</i> or <i>for</i> them) supports students becoming participants in a range of contexts
Contributors to the well-being of New Zealand	The life skills learned through a restorative approach will certainly contribute directly to New Zealand's social well being
Lifelong Learners	
Critical and creative thinkers	Restorative practices certainly encourage reflection and problem solving
Informed decision makers	Restorative practices, through their emphasis on reflection and active listening, help people make informed decisions

As far as the values of *The New Zealand Curriculum* are concerned, four resonate strongly with the values of restorative practices and can be encouraged, modelled and explored through the school's adoption of restorative practices.

Students will be encouraged to value:

Equity, through fairness and social justice;

Community and participation for the common good;

Integrity, which involves being honest, responsible, and accountable, and acting ethically;

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

(*The New Zealand Curriculum* p10)

The New Zealand Curriculum goes on to state: "The specific ways in which these values find expression in an individual school will be guided by dialogue between the school and its community. They should be evident in the school's philosophy, structures, curriculum, classrooms, and relationships. When the school has developed strongly

held and clearly articulated values, those values are likely to be expressed in everyday actions and interactions within the school” (p10).

When schools implement a wider interpretation of restorative practices, then the values of equity, community and participation, integrity, and respect will indeed “be evident in the school’s philosophy, structures, curriculum, classrooms, and relationships”.

The New Zealand Curriculum also identifies five key competencies, which it defines as capabilities for living and lifelong learning. These are thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing. It is clear that two of these key competencies, relating to others, and participating and contributing, are directly promoted by restorative practices, through their emphasis on building positive relationships and working collaboratively to build safe and inclusive classrooms and school communities. Thinking and managing self are promoted by a restorative approach to a lesser extent. Restorative practices do promote reflective, critical and creative thinking in terms of evaluating your own behaviour, seeking constructive alternatives, and problem solving, for example, but the thinking key competency also requires students to develop other types of thinking skills in a range of different contexts. Managing self is about a “can-do” attitude and self-motivation. Again restorative practices can help build the conditions which foster the development of this competency, and students’ reliability, resourcefulness and resilience, while other aspects of this key competency can be developed in other contexts in the school.

The *New Zealand Curriculum* also has a section called Effective Pedagogy, which outlines actions teachers should take in promoting student learning.

The first of these, *Creating a supportive learning environment*, is the one most strongly supported by restorative practices. Indeed, the accompanying descriptor could have come from a restorative practices handbook.

Learning is inseparable from its social and cultural context. Students learn best when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community. Effective teachers foster positive relationships within environments that are caring, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and cohesive. (p34)

Also relevant are *Encouraging reflective thought and action*, with its emphasis on reflection; *Facilitating shared learning*, with its focus on “cultivating the class as a learning community”, which restorative practice strategies such as circles promote; and *Teaching as inquiry*, where teachers are asked to investigate the teaching learning relationship, with a view to determining the strategies and approaches that will best assist students to achieve.

In short, it seems that restorative practices are very closely aligned with *The New Zealand Curriculum* and that the school-wide adoption of restorative practices would

materially assist in the implementation of the new curriculum and the achievement of its vision.

Another recent change which schools are asked to adopt is the Registered Teacher Criteria (2010). These are the criteria for quality teaching which all registered teachers in New Zealand schools are required to meet.

There are twelve criteria in all, five of which relate to the dimension of professional relationships and professional values, and seven of which relate to professional knowledge. The criteria are overlapping and it is possible to see connections with restorative practices in every criterion. However, four of the criteria relate particularly strongly to restorative practices: criteria 1, 2, 7, 12.

Table 2: The RELATIONSHIP between the REGISTERED TEACHER CRITERIA and RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Fully registered teachers:		
Criteria	Key Indicators	Relation to restorative practices
1. establish and maintain effective professional relationships focused on the learning and well-being of all ākongā	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. engage in ethical, respectful, positive and collaborative professional relationships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ākongā • teaching colleagues, support staff and other professionals • whānau and other carers of ākongā • agencies, groups and individuals in the community 	Restorative practices are all about engaging in respectful relationships, not only with students, but also modelling respect in our relationships with colleagues, parents and others. Restorative practices are also about being ethical in terms of taking responsibility for our choices and about working collaboratively.
2. demonstrate commitment to promoting the well-being of all ākongā	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. take all reasonable steps to provide and maintain a teaching and learning environment that is physically, socially, culturally and emotionally safe ii. acknowledge and respect the languages, heritages and cultures of all ākongā iii. comply with relevant regulatory and statutory requirements 	By adopting restorative values and principles, teachers will be taking effective steps to provide an environment which is physically, socially, culturally and emotionally safe. The inclusiveness principle of restorative practices should ensure that teachers acknowledge and respect other cultures.
7. promote a collaborative, inclusive and supportive learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. demonstrate effective management of the learning setting which incorporates successful strategies to engage and motivate ākongā ii. foster trust, respect and cooperation with and among ākongā 	By using restorative practices, a teacher will be providing an ordered and respectful learning setting where trust and respect are fostered and students feel valued and ready and able to get on with their learning

12. use critical inquiry and problem-solving effectively in their professional practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. systematically and critically engage with evidence and professional literature to reflect on and refine practice ii. respond professionally to feedback from members of their learning community iii. critically examine their own beliefs, including cultural beliefs, and how they impact on their professional practice and the achievement of ākonga 	Restorative practices provide a framework for inquiring into, and getting feedback on, managing relationships and creating the conditions for successful student engagement and achievement.
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By engaging positively with restorative practices, teachers will be well on the way to demonstrating competence in at least four of the Registered Teacher Criteria.

THE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

A final significant benefit of understanding the thinking and philosophy that underpin restorative practices is that this understanding provides a solid basis for decision making and evaluating practice in schools. In a couple of projects (Restorative Justice Consortium 2004, Kane et al, 2007), attempts were made to clarify this underlying thinking by teasing out the values and principles of restorative practices. This seemed to me to be an excellent idea. However, I found one to be very long, detailing 28 principles, and the other used the terms ‘value’ and ‘principle’ interchangeably, whereas I think it is useful to make a distinction. Values are beliefs that we hold dear about what is important to us, whereas principles are how we put those values into action. I have therefore used the ideas of Restorative Justice Consortium and Kane et al to develop a table of what I have come to see as some of the key values and principles of restorative practices.

Table 3: VALUES and PRINCIPLES of a RESTORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

VALUES	PRINCIPLES
1. respect	We treat everyone in the school community as we wish to be treated We treat everyone as of equal worth, no matter their age, sex, ethnicity, or past history We work with people rather than do things to or for them
2. empathy	We develop an awareness of the impact of our words and deeds on others We listen with the heart
3. honesty	We speak honestly without minimising or exaggerating We reflect honestly on our words and actions and seek better ways (Change and growth is fostered by honest self-reflection) We practise effective interpersonal communication
4. responsibility,	We assume responsibility and accountability for our actions and their

accountability	<p>impact on others</p> <p>We work to repair harm and rebuild relationships</p> <p>We work through issues until they are resolved</p> <p>We return issues of conflict and difficulty to the participants, rather than solve them for them</p>
5. open mindedness	<p>We give all involved a chance to speak</p> <p>We listen to everyone’s story</p> <p>We refrain from making assumptions and jumping to conclusions</p> <p>We investigate incidents thoroughly</p> <p>We resist the urge to assign labels to people</p>
6. collaboration, interdependence	<p>We work together to develop clear expectations for all</p> <p>We work together to find effective solutions to problems</p> <p>We all contribute to a culture of respectful relationships</p> <p>We succeed when everyone succeeds</p>
7. learning	<p>We support each other to learn more effective practices</p> <p>We view conflict as an opportunity to learn</p> <p>We create opportunities for reflective change in pupils and staff</p>
8. equity, inclusiveness	<p>We involve everyone in school with decisions about their own lives</p> <p>We treat everyone as of equal worth, no matter their age, sex, ethnicity, or past history</p> <p>We are committed to open, transparent, equitable processes</p>
9. fairness	<p>We are committed to open, transparent, equitable processes</p> <p>We separate the deed from the doer</p> <p>We work through issues until they are resolved</p> <p>We support each other to find solutions to issues, rather than pathologise behaviour</p>
10. safety, security, orderliness	<p>We work together to develop clear expectations for all</p> <p>We keep small things small</p> <p>We work with people rather than do things to or for them</p> <p>We build a community of care</p> <p>We work through issues until they are resolved</p> <p>We hold people accountable for their actions</p>

Adapted from the work of Restorative Justice Consortium (2004) and Kane et al (2007)

Some of the principles derive from more than one value: the principle “We work through issues until they are resolved” relates equally to the values of fairness (it is unfair to leave some issues unresolved and resolve others, for example); responsibility (a responsible student or staff member ensures matters are resolved in a timely manner); and safety (a victim can feel threatened or at risk if a matter is not resolved).

It is possible to debate the values and principles, and some people might exclude some and include others. I don’t think that matters. What is useful is the discussion and debate that a school staff has around the values and principles, so that everyone understands them and is clear about what they mean in their setting.

This discussion may also highlight conflicts between values and current school practice. For example, can we value inclusiveness and at the same time have high levels of stand down, suspension, expulsion and exclusion? Can we value learning, and yet allow a student to make only one serious mistake? Can we teachers value responsibility when we sometimes do not acknowledge the contribution we may have made to a particular incident or its escalation? Such a discussion will alert schools to discrepancies and help bring alignment between the school's stated position and what actually happens.

Having clarity around the values and principles of restorative practices will lead to greater consistency and success of practice in the school.

1b SCHOOL VISITS: PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

In my visits, I was interested to see whether the schools had adopted a broader interpretation of restorative practices philosophy and how restorative practices dovetailed in with the New Zealand Curriculum; and to deduce some of the values and principles of their system from the way it was operating.

All schools visited believed that restorative practices were about more than running conferences for serious offences, or indeed about the school's behaviour management system. At one school, restorative practices were characterised as "creating a school culture where all accept responsibility for issues and working through them" and as being about "valuing relationships". Another school talked about the reflection and personal learning involved: Restorative practices build "empathy by assisting people to reconsider their actions and develop an understanding of their effect on others". Another teacher at the same school talked about them providing "an opportunity to restore relationships and respect and to understand the impact of actions. They are a learning process for perpetrator and victim."

Some schools were even wider in their interpretation. A principal at one school and deputy principal at another both said: "It's all about relationships". The principal of another school said, "It's about relationship based teaching," and referred to the work of Kenn Fisher, which showed this approach to be four times more effective than traditional approaches.

All the schools visited had placed a high value on respectful relationships between all members of the school community. While restorative practices may have been a driver for this, and certainly were in alignment with this emphasis, the implementation of the school's vision and values, and/ or the New Zealand Curriculum were also powerful drivers. I consistently found that all schools had a sharp focus on their values. And while the students may not have known the language and terminology of restorative practices, they did know about the school's key values (and respect always featured).

In fact, it seemed to me that restorative practices and the New Zealand Curriculum were working hand-in-hand in these schools. All the schools spoke of the importance of their values as guidelines for behaviour in their schools, both staff and student, and evidence of this was apparent in signage about the school and in school publications. In one school, children were recognised for displaying the school values, and once they had received recognition in all (this school promoted six key values), their photos were put up for a time in the main foyer.

In addition, all schools were exploiting the connection between key competencies and restorative practices. There was a varied emphasis put on the key competencies, with one school developing a system with accompanying rubrics which assessed students' progress towards demonstrating these.

There was also significant discussion in all schools about the impact of restorative practices on pedagogy. There was a strong focus on creating a positive learning environment through the use of negotiated classroom agreements and clear expectations about how the class would work together. This was supplemented in some of the schools by the regular use of circle time, especially in classes up to Year 10.

The alignment between the New Zealand Curriculum and restorative practices was both advancing the implementation of the new curriculum in the schools and giving validity and reinforcement to the restorative practices philosophy and approach.

Values and principles

All the schools visited had systems in place which reflected the values and principles outlined in table 3. Each school is different and has developed a restorative practices system and programme which reflects its character and best suits its needs. Consequently, some values or principles may receive more emphasis in one school than another. However, I believe it is fair to say that all of the schools, sometimes without making all of these values and principles explicit, are striving to foster and model the restorative values and have their practice guided by the restorative principles, or similar principles.

2 BEST PRACTICE

2a READINGS: BEST PRACTICE

What is best practice when it comes to restorative practices in schools? From the research articles and reports I read, best practice is something which is evolving. There is no single best way of being a restorative practices school. Understanding of what might constitute best practice in this area is continually growing and developing as schools learn from experience and by networking with other like-minded schools; as they learn from relationships with academics and the research work they are

undertaking both here and overseas (some undertaken by currently practising teachers); and as they learn from international organisations set up to foster restorative practices, such as the IIRP. The New Zealand Ministry of Education has promoted restorative practices for a number of years, initially as part of the suspension reduction initiative. This involvement has brought overseas experts such as Margaret Thorsborne to our shores to share ideas at sector meetings and to provide training for those wishing to implement restorative practices in their schools. In the relatively short span of time that restorative practices have been operating in schools, there has been a wealth of literature produced on the nature of restorative practices, how to carry them out effectively, and the success stories that restorative practices have generated.

From the reading I have undertaken relevant to this aspect of restorative practices (especially Blood and Thorsborne, 2005; Buckley and Maxwell 2007; Drewery and Winslade 2003; Gossen 1996; Martin and Bin Yusoff 2007; Mirsky 2003; Mirsky 2011, Morrison 2005; Wachtel 2008), it seems the following are key aspects of best practice in building an effective restorative culture in a school.

Vision: schools need to have a clear idea of where they wish to go and what they want for their students from the outset. This may be a vision of what the school will be like when restorative practices are implemented, or it may be the vision they have developed for the school and restorative practices is a significant driver in achieving that vision.

Values: schools need to be very clear about their values, and they need to be in alignment with the restorative approach. The values need to be understood by all in the school community, and supported by all the school processes (e.g. curriculum, behaviour management system, extra-curricular activities).

Principles: restorative principles need to guide decisions and actions in the school.

Definition: the literature supports a broader interpretation of the nature of restorative practices, as explained above (p7). Where restorative practices are only used as an extra tool for dealing with serious offending by students, there is a significant risk of failure.

Systems: systems not only need to be in alignment with restorative practices values and principles, but they also need to be clear and simple to operate. Working with a restorative approach means that when there is a problem it is sorted out by the parties, rather than referred to someone else. This means an extra investment of time by teachers. If systems are not as efficient as possible, then this time pressure can be exacerbated, frustrating already busy teachers, and thus encouraging teachers to revert to former practices such as giving a consequence.

Monitoring and review: successful RP schools monitor the implementation process and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of restorative practices themselves, gathering data

from a variety of sources. Having gathered this information, they then respond appropriately, making any adjustments needed.

Commitment: school staff need to buy-in to restorative practices. They need to be convinced that they are sensible, worthwhile, and valid. They need to develop the attitude and disposition to use them at all times. This buy-in often comes when there is a crisis, or people have come to the realisation that what they are currently doing is not working well enough, and so they are ready and open to a different approach.

Knowledge and skills: school staff need to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the key ideas and aims of restorative practices, and the skills to carry them out, at least at the lower level of the triangle (the proactive, everyday strategies that are used in class such as the mini-chat). In the literature, many schools have invested significant funds in accessing expert training for teachers and support staff, while others have successfully used in-house professional development, provided mainly by the more skilled and knowledgeable of their own staff.

Professional learning community: teachers need to open up their practice to their colleagues to share successes, inquire jointly into their practice, and seek feedback from trusted colleagues, as they work to get ever better at restorative practices and achieve the vision. Blood and Thorsborne talk about staff “shar[ing] the stories (butterflies and bullfrogs)” and “participat[ing] in professional forums and networks.”(2005:14).

Persistence: leaders and schools need to keep working at implementing and refining restorative practices. Martin and Bin Yusoff (2007) talk about the process of cementing restorative practices in schools taking at least five years. It is not a change that can occur in a short time. In fact, schools need to be prepared to continually revisit the vision, the philosophy and the skills if they wish restorative practices to become embedded in the school culture. The school leader needs to demonstrate this persistence by continually bringing restorative practices into the foreground of teacher attention.

Leadership: like any school-wide initiative, restorative practices need effective leadership. This can come from a respected individual or a team. The principal is most often this leader, but not necessarily: however, if the heart of the principal is not in restorative practices, they are doomed to struggle. It is important that the leaders need to model the restorative approach in all of their interactions.

2b SCHOOL VISITS: BEST PRACTICE

How then did the schools measure up against the criteria for best practice outlined above?

Vision: all schools had a vision around student engagement and success for every student, which restorative practices could help the school achieve. Restorative practices were sometimes specifically mentioned in the school charter or annual plan, and thus were formally put in front of whole school community.

Values: this was an area of strength in all the schools I visited. The people I spoke with were able to articulate the school's key values (usually reduced to three). These values were in alignment with restorative practices (respect, responsibility, and honesty featured strongly) and reinforced by ubiquitous signage, inclusion in school publications and website, and in some cases by specific linking of curriculum content to the values, as in English, social studies or health and physical education classes. In one school, the values were the focus of a whole term's programme in Y7 and 8 health and physical education classes. In another, each class teased out what the values meant to them and what they would look like in their class. In a third school, the values were highlighted during theme weeks, such as respect week, where a number of activities were held to bring the value to the foreground and deepen understanding and commitment. In most schools, the values were reflected in the class agreements or class contracts which were also displayed in the rooms.

Principles: all of the schools showed a clear understanding of the principles as they explained how restorative practices worked in their context, even if this understanding was implicit, rather than specifically stated.

Definition: as explained above (p14-15) all schools visited embraced a broader definition of restorative practices, and this was expressed in the way they strove to build a culture of care and respect in the school as the foundation for everything else.

Systems: the introduction of restorative practices meant a review of systems and processes in each of the schools to bring everything into alignment. This is ongoing work as schools tweak and update their systems and processes as they become more knowledgeable about what works and more confident in their practice. The most common system change was to the behaviour management system to reflect the move away from authoritarian and punitive measures to restorative approaches. Schools promulgated these systems through a variety of media (e.g. staff handbooks, flow charts, pamphlets, website). Having clear, well-known and well-used systems and processes was seen as crucial in ensuring good order and effective practice, as well as overcoming the concerns of the sceptics on the staff. All schools had developed comprehensive systems to reflect their restorative approach. Each tried to make the system as simple and clear as possible, so that staff and students were in no doubt about expectations and procedures. The

systems were set up so that there was certainty of follow up, a good balance between effectiveness and speed of response (sufficient time to allow for reflection and perspective to be gained; but issues were not allowed to drag on), and good record-keeping.

In two schools, the work of reviewing systems and processes was entrusted to staff who may have been a little sceptical initially about restorative practices, and feared it may be a soft option. Having them involved in the system design helped increase their commitment, and turn them into advocates for the approach.

In one school, the guidance team meets every day after school for fifteen minutes to oversee the system to ensure that issues (these are moderate to serious issues where students had been removed from class) are being dealt with appropriately and that no students are falling through the cracks.

Also seen as vital was regular communication back to staff about where students are in the system and what the next step is.

The most common reported effect of this change in systems was it empowered teachers to take charge of what was happening in their rooms and deal with issues themselves rather than constantly referring students out of class.

Taking a wider view, the introduction of restorative practices had led to broader system changes, such as the introduction of a three-100-minute-period day in one school. As the principal said: "I couldn't contemplate this change without the restorative practices philosophy. We keep looking for ways to connect with kids and connect them with their learning. We have a relationship-based curriculum."

Monitoring and review: schools used a variety of processes to evaluate their progress. Anonymous surveys (NZCER Me and My School or in-house ones) of student opinion on school climate and culture were a common feature. The schools felt that the findings of these surveys indicated a lot of positives, but also indicated areas that needed extra work or further attention.

Analysis of behaviour data was also widespread. All schools reported significant reductions in suspensions and stand downs. They also reported significant reductions in referrals out of class for moderate incidents.

Staff opinion was also sought in several of the schools. Analysis of this feedback was used to identify next steps for professional development and to make adjustments where needed to systems.

In two of the schools, staff members have undertaken a research project investigating the effect and impact of restorative practices in their schools, which provided valuable information in identifying successes and next steps, and thus helped shape the future direction of the programme. Two of the schools mentioned that when a staff member removed a student from class, s/he was asked to fill out a review sheet for senior management. This helped senior management not only monitor restorative practices and their use but could also identify staff who might need some support or further training.

Knowledge and skills: as in the literature, the training of staff was seen as vital. Two schools spoke specifically of the power of the Margaret Thorsborne three day training workshops, to provide staff with both transformative experiences in terms of their thinking and also high quality training in the necessary skills. All schools agreed however, that the three day training had to be continually supplemented with regular updates at staff meetings or in-house professional development sessions, so that the change became embedded.

Two schools also firmly believed that the in-school professional development sessions needed to be practical with people being involved and practising skills through role-plays, rather than just receiving information or discussion. Role-plays “make it real and can be related to actual school situations.”

One leader stressed having quality learning time for this in-house training, rather than when teachers were tired at the end of the day.

Most schools also believed that the three day training should be made available as widely as possible, certainly to all teachers who wanted it, and to support staff as well. The challenge was in meeting the costs of the training and relief required. Some schools reduced this cost by having the trainer come to run a two day course at Teacher Only Days at the end or start of a year.

The training was supported by the provision of resources. In some schools, the key questions of the restorative chat were posted up on walls, and provided for staff on a small card that went inside a clear plastic keeper on their key ring, so it was always to hand.

A couple of the schools also spoke highly of the leadership and support provided by the RTLB service. In these schools, an RTLB was on the restorative practices committee and led professional development sessions for staff in the schools. The RTLB also ran specific training sessions for support staff.

Professional learning community: all schools acknowledged the importance of teachers sharing practice, success stories and challenges, both formally (e.g. through meetings, peer observation and feedback), and informally. In two schools, some of the in-house professional development was undertaken through team or syndicate meetings, and this has helped build this group into a professional learning community. Issues can be raised, suggestions shared, and plans devised in this setting. In one school, staff who feel less confident with the approach are paired up with a buddy to provide support and bounce ideas off.

In a couple of schools an interest group was set up around restorative practices. This group took on a leadership role, surveying staff as to training needs and designing specific sessions for in-house professional development. In one school, this voluntary group which has a cross-section of participants from novice to experienced teachers, with some staff in leadership positions also active members, has changed its name from the restorative practices group to the effective practice group, to reflect the wider interpretation of restorative practices, and engage a wider group of teachers. I suggest that this name also reflects the close relationship between restorative practices and effective pedagogy.

Persistence: this quality kept being mentioned as an important factor. First, it was important to be persistent in relationship to students. Staff needed to keep on working to find ways to keep a student at school, engaged in learning and thinking and acting positively. Secondly, the leadership team needs to show persistence with the restorative practice approach. One leader summed it up thus: “It takes time. We have been working with restorative practices since 2007, but we didn’t really start getting traction until term two 2010.” Leaders have to keep putting the approach in front of staff regularly and in a variety of ways, so that staff come to believe that this is no passing fad but a long term commitment by the school.

Leadership: as in the literature, the support of the principal was seen as vital to the successful functioning of restorative practices. In half of the schools, the principal was the leader of the change and restorative practices’ strongest proponent. In the other schools the active leadership of the restorative approach was devolved to another senior leader or a leadership team; but even in these cases, the active and ongoing support of the principal was seen to be critical in the continuing success of the approach.

Likewise, all schools identified the support of the Board of Trustees as a significant success factor. Although the Board may not have been active in promoting restorative practices, it was seen as essential that board members had a good understanding of restorative practices, and were able to be supportive when questions were asked, and if matters did come to a discipline hearing of the Board of Trustees, the board members could be restorative in their approach at this level.

Three in-school leaders shared stories with me about their former selves, and about the transition they went through from being more of a traditional punitive teacher to becoming restorative. They believe that this transformation was a powerful example to staff. The leaders were modelling the change they expected from others.

Leaders were crucial in ensuring that the aspects of best practice were facilitated. They led the development of the vision; they promoted, modelled, and reinforced the values (principal talks at assembly were a key way of foregrounding the values and restorative practices); they used the principles to guide and inform decision-making; they ensured that systems were reviewed and aligned; they continually monitored the effectiveness of the programme and instigated modifications where needed; they promoted the training opportunities and ensured resourcing was prioritised to allow this to happen; they fostered the development of professional learning communities; and they were persistent in their focus and endeavour to build a restorative culture in the school.

Generally the leaders reported that they worked collaboratively with staff, harnessing the skills and energies of the early adopters and enthusiasts; encouraging and acknowledging successes; and cultivating the conditions where the approach could thrive. At times they also used their positional power to bring about the change. One principal said that the move to circle time in Years 7 and 8 had to be mandated, as the voluntary approach had not got the desired level of change up to that point. Another principal said that all staff know that restorative practices is the only way they will deal

with issues in the school, and he does not waver from this.

What was the Impact of Having Effective Restorative Practices in the School?

Schools reported significantly fewer behaviour incidents across the board, as teachers managed relationships at the classroom level and had the skills to defuse issues and to prevent them from escalating. There were fewer serious issues being referred on to senior managers, and a significant drop in the numbers of stand downs and suspensions. One school has had no suspensions since 2006, as it determines to deal with everything restoratively, finding pathways for students wherever possible (e.g. alternative education), and striving to assist them to be ready to make a full return to the classroom. All schools still used stand downs, but they were being used within a restorative framework. They were generally of a short duration (one day) to allow some time for reflection. When the student returned, there was a restorative conference carried out and plan developed prior to re-entry to class.

Overall, schools reported that staff and students said that they enjoyed a much more positive culture because of the restorative approach. Students felt safe at school and enjoyed school. They felt supported and assisted if an issue arose. They were more willing to report incidents and seek assistance. One school said that they recently had students coming to senior staff to report some behaviour out of concern for the wrong doer: they believed he needed help. Students are empowered to take the lead: in one school students were noticed telling newcomers: “we don’t do that here”.

Restorative practices provided schools with effective ways to deal with issues. Reflection prompts and mini-chats allowed staff to keep small things small and deal with classroom management issues quickly and simply. Strategies such as a “no blame conference” allowed staff and students to discuss problems, share perspectives, and negotiate solutions to broader in-class issues, so that effective teaching and learning could take place. Restorative conferences provided an excellent process for dealing with serious issues, which allowed people harmed or negatively affected to have a voice, while perpetrators were assisted to understand different perspectives, repair the harm, and find more constructive ways of behaving and relating. Even more importantly for this last group of students, who often pose difficulties for schools because of the many challenges they are facing in their lives, restorative practices encourages and enables schools to find pathways forward for them. Instead of excluding students who have issues with behaviour, schools are using restorative practices to negotiate a positive return to school and to develop a plan for the student to engage positively and avoid identified problems. They are providing students with specific supports and programmes to meet their needs and help them achieve their goals. For these students, restorative practices provide the opportunity for a significant turn-around in their lives and the opportunity to become successful members of society. Although restorative practices, and especially the restorative conference, can be very time consuming, the schools reported positive results and low levels of recidivism. So

although a lot of time may be spent on restorative practices, it tended to produce enduring results.

The schools reported many benefits of restorative practices for teachers. Staff enjoyed a more positive school culture. This was reflected in key areas such as grounds duty. As one leader said: “There is a much nicer environment in the playground for doing duty.” Another benefit for teachers is the more positive relationships that they enjoy with students. At one school it was expressed thus: “There are much calmer teacher student relationships. The kids and teachers show each other respect. There is much less silly stuff.” The restorative practices mean that there are ways to sort out issues when they arise. One teacher said, “It is much easier now to go up to a child and sort out an issue. There is a process which is fair and not confrontational.” Another benefit of positive teacher student relationships, is that teacher talk about students in the staffroom tends to be more understanding and less labelling. One leader said that teachers “come to understand the wider lives of students and families, and become more empathetic.”

Overall, the leaders felt that restorative practices empowered teachers to deal with their own issues and to provide clear processes when they needed to be referred. As one principal said, “Restorative practices has the power to turn teacher student conversations from being about behaviour and being good or bad, to being about learning and achievement.” Most schools believed that teachers felt more supported under RP and behaviour management was not a major issue. “Students are more accountable for their choices and behaviours,” one leader commented.

Another benefit was in the relationship between the school and the parents of students in trouble. Schools reported that these parents generally were very positive about the restorative approach, and felt that it was a problem-solving process that did not stigmatise them as parents. This helped to build trust and mutual respect between the school and these parents.

There were benefits also for school leaders under RP. Instead of having the role of judge and punisher, school leaders were enabled to support students, and even become student advocates. One DP commented that “RP gives a level playing field and there is equity for all.” The leaders enjoyed working in this climate where there was a greater sense of fairness for all.

There was also a sense that leading and modelling restorative practices, and taking a hand in helping people solve problems, was really important work. One principal told of his experiences in dealing with an issue which involved students having marijuana on a school trip. He spoke of his initial frustration and disappointment, and the huge amount of time he put in leading up to the conference. However, the openness at the conference, the uncovering of issues and subsequent development of plans had made it all worthwhile. He felt that there had been a significant breakthrough with these students. “It’s life changing stuff [for them]. I wouldn’t trade the last ten days for anything.”

Most schools reported a sustained and continuing positive trend in student achievement across all levels. Two of the schools talked proudly about NCEA results that were very high nationally for their school's decile. They also pointed to their pleasingly high NCEA results for their Maori students. These schools attributed this academic success in large part to the restorative culture and positive atmosphere in their schools, where students are engaged and able to focus on their learning goals.

3 CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

3a READINGS: CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

There have been many publications on successful implementation of change in both the business world and in schools. I found John P Kotter's 'eight steps to successful change' encapsulated the best of the thinking around this topic.

Kotter is the author of *Leading Change* (1996) and *The Heart Of Change* (2002) which outline a helpful model for understanding and managing change.

Kotter's eight step change model can be summarised as:

1. Increase urgency: inspire people to move, and make objectives real and relevant.
2. Build the guiding team: get the right people in place with the right emotional commitment, and the right mix of skills and levels.
3. Get the vision right: get the team to establish a simple vision and strategy, and to focus on emotional and creative aspects necessary to drive service and efficiency.
4. Communicate for buy-in: involve as many people as possible, communicate the essentials simply, and appeal and respond to people's needs.
5. Empower action: remove obstacles, enable constructive feedback and lots of support from leaders. Acknowledge progress and achievements.
6. Create short-term wins: set aims that are easy to achieve in bite-size chunks. Have a manageable number of initiatives. Finish current stages before starting new ones.
7. Don't let up: foster and encourage determination and persistence and ongoing progress reporting. Highlight milestones and future targets.
8. Make change stick: reinforce the value of successful change via recruitment, promotion, and new change leaders. Weave change into culture.

3b SCHOOL VISITS: CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

The school visits showed the schools all using some, if not all, of Kotter's eight steps for change.

1. Increase urgency: several of the schools talked about the urgent need for change as being an initial driver, whether it was the embarrassingly high exclusion statistics, or a general dissatisfaction of the culture of the school
2. Build the guiding team: many schools talked about the importance of passionate leaders. One principal called them his "champions" for change, and how their passion, skill and credibility with the wider staff were key factors in instigating and cementing the change in his school. Another school had an effective practice group – a cross curricular voluntary grouping of teachers who devised in-house professional development, reviewed systems, and provided resources. This group became an important driver of the successful implementation of the change.
3. Get the vision right: This aspect came across not so much as a vision for having restorative practices successfully implemented; but more a vision of what the school would look like when a restorative culture was in place; and the benefits of such a culture to staff, students, parents and the Board of Trustees. One leader said that believing restorative practices were the best way and having them as part of the school vision was a key success factor.
4. Communicate for buy-in: the most successful method of this step was when people were involved in a restorative conference and experienced for themselves what a powerful process this could be. This was especially true in a number of the schools with the doubtful or cynical staff members, some of whom turned out to be the system's more passionate advocates after such an experience.
Also important was the opportunity to be involved in high quality professional development. Some schools spoke of the inspirational training provided by Margaret Thorsborne, which won the hearts and minds of the participants, while others spoke equally glowingly of the training provided by Greg Jansen and Richie Matla. All the schools had tried to make the training as widely available as possible, and also did not see it as a "one hit wonder" – the training was ongoing and reinforced by sessions at Teacher Only Days and staff meetings. A number of schools extended the availability of training to teacher aides and other support staff, and two schools had Board of Trustees members train.
5. Empower action: One of the obstacles identified was existing systems and structures. Most of the schools spoken to had made significant changes to their structures and systems to ensure there was alignment between restorative practices and all other systems.

Schools were keen to share their success data with all of their stakeholders, and celebrate these successes in a variety of ways.

6. Create short-term wins: the importance of a staged implementation plan was mentioned in some schools.
Sharing the outcomes of successful conferences with the whole staff was one way of creating short-term wins which a number of schools identified as contributing to the long-term success of the initiative.
While most schools acknowledged that there were a number of changes they were implementing, they consistently foregrounded restorative practices through professional development, signage, and school communications, so that the focus was not lost.
7. Don't let up: persistence was a key element of successful change implementation. One school leader said a key success factor in implementing the change was her principal's "doggedness". One principal said restorative practices were successfully implemented at his school because "I have not taken my foot off the pedal".
Communicating success data such as reduced stand downs and suspensions, reduced referrals from class, and positive results from student climate surveys were common ways of reporting progress.
8. Make change stick: A deputy principal at one school said that a key success factor was implementing restorative practices through the curriculum, especially through their strong emphasis on key competencies, rather than as a way of doing behaviour management. Certainly, a focus on key competencies and values was evident in all the schools visited.
Most schools identified that they could do more to make change stick by involving students more directly in the ideas and processes, so that they developed understandings and skills which they could use not only in assisting with issues in school (e.g. through peer mediation and student leadership), but also in their wider lives. Two schools had made good progress in this area while others were in the planning stage.

Challenges

Overall, my research endorsed the restorative approach as a very successful one when it was well implemented in schools. It is not a panacea, but does have significant strengths in building a strong school culture of care and respect, in assisting students to develop key competencies and strong values, and in providing a problem-solving approach to issues that arise. Its positive benefits for all stakeholders in the school community are significant. Restorative practices align with the New Zealand Curriculum and offer schools a significant pathway for achieving its vision.

However, there are several challenges that need further work, both at the school level, and from academic researchers. These challenges were identified variously at the schools I visited, and some also occur in the literature.

The biggest challenge comes with staff, as it is their daily interactions with students that are crucial to the establishment and maintenance of a restorative school culture. First there are the teachers who believe that restorative practices are soft and do not work. They see them as undermining their authority and resist their implementation. The schools visited reported that as the restorative culture took hold in their schools, these either came on board or left for other positions elsewhere. Different strategies were effective in gaining a change of heart. For some it was experiencing the transformative power of the three day training. One principal likened it to experiencing an epiphany. For others, it was involving them all along the way in the change, and inviting them to be active participants in its implementation into the school. For another group, it was providing gentle ongoing support, often one-to-one, and helping them to make the shift by degrees.

Secondly, most of us, no matter how passionate we are about the values and ideals of restorative practices, can revert to old patterns of behaviour when tired or stressed. Some schools had systems in place to support staff to reflect and grow from instances such as this, and felt it was important to challenge staff (in a restorative manner) so that the desired interactions are maintained.

The third challenge with staff is the ongoing need for training. Trained staff leave and new staff need training. Existing staff need continual updating. This means the implementation of restorative practices is something that is never finished. Therefore, there needs to be ongoing resource provision to ensure that this vital training continues. Having a restorative practices or an effective practice group was an excellent way of monitoring the need for ongoing development and designing and providing it for staff.

Another challenge mentioned in some schools was “recycled students”: students who seemed to be able to say the right things and yet kept repeating unwanted behaviours. In effect, these students are paying lip-service to the restorative process and not making the change in attitude or behaviour that will help them build positive relationships with others in the school. Schools emphasised that it was important to raise the level of challenge as the student repeated bad choices. Good record keeping was fundamental: staff have to know what has happened in the past and what has been negotiated, so that something more effective can be put in place the second time. Schools also mentioned the importance of teasing out the meaning of the restorative actions planned by the student. Using questions which help the student understand other perspectives and explore beyond the surface of pat answers was seen as the best approach. Examples cited included: “So what will your apology mean for your behaviour in that class? How will that benefit you? How will it benefit the class? The teacher? How will we know that your apology is sincere? You apologised last time:

what will be different about it this time? What will your apology look like in three weeks' time? What else do you think you need to do to put things right? If someone had done that to you, what would you expect him to do to fix things up? Is there anything else that needs to be done? Who else has been affected? How? What might you do for them to show that you want to put things right?"

Another challenge is that schools are trying to work in a restorative manner at a time when punitive attitudes are deeply entrenched in society. Schools are all familiar with the parents who want to see the person who has harmed their child severely punished; what one school called the "parents who are baying for blood". While the schools encountered this phenomenon, they held steadfastly to their beliefs, and calmly told the parents that there was a process that they used for matters like this. They reported that the vast majority of these parents usually came around once they had understood the process, and experienced for themselves its rigour and compassion.

A final challenge is the place of punishment in a restorative school, especially stand downs and suspensions. As Buckley and Maxwell say, "there are problems in achieving quality results when, in order to give a breathing space for everyone and to set in place the processes needed to arrange a meeting, a formal legal process that stigmatises the student is used as the first step. This may be considered a compromise in restorative principles and therefore may harm the overall ability of restorative practices to be identified by students as a non-punitive approach" (2007, p20).

All of the schools are using the stand down and suspension provisions (although one school has not suspended since 2006), mainly for those students who refuse to engage in the restorative process, by not accepting responsibility for their actions or working to put things right with those affected. Restorative practices are the option of first choice, but to work, require the commitment of all parties, and the schools reserve the right to use other measures when a student refuses to commit to the restorative process. It seems to me that there is no avoiding this step in these circumstances. The schools visited were in a variety of different places on the continuum as far as other punishments, such as detention, were concerned, but the trend appeared to be that these punishments became increasingly irrelevant in restorative schools as they moved towards a fully restorative culture.

Conclusions

I believe it is important and useful to develop a clear understanding of restorative practices philosophy. It is possible to take a narrow view of restorative practices: to see them as a method of dealing with student behaviour issues, particularly at the serious end of the spectrum where significant harm has been done. However, I believe that to take this narrow view is to miss many of the advantages that restorative practices offers. This reactive view of restorative practices is the “ambulance at the bottom of the cliff”, whereas taking the broader view enables a proactive approach which directly benefits all members of the school community.

When we take the larger view of restorative practices, that they are about relationship management and building a positive, inclusive, respectful school culture, there is in fact a reduced need for serious interventions, as students are more engaged in school, are happier about the way things are done at school, and there are processes in place to sort things out before they grow too large.

The implementation of restorative practices in schools not only builds a respectful culture but also provides schools with avenues for achieving the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum. The restorative approach, when implemented broadly, is student centred, just as the NZC is. It supports the focus on values, the development of key competencies and helps prepare students to take an active part in society and for living in an increasing diverse and changing world in the future.

There are significant benefits for students who work in a restorative school. There is a culture of inclusiveness and tolerance of difference. Students feel safe and can engage fully in their learning. They learn important attitudes and values such as respect, responsibility, and accountability. They see respectful relationships and problem solving approaches in action and learn their benefits, which they can apply in their wider lives.

There are also a number of tangible benefits for teachers in working in a restorative school. There is a more settled school environment with less confrontation. Teachers are empowered to deal with situations themselves rather than pass them on to senior teachers. Issues are not escalated and there are processes for resolving them. Teachers enjoy their work environment more as a result. However, restorative practices are not without challenges for teachers. They are generally more time consuming than issuing a detention, and finding the time to deal with issues restoratively is not easy. However, because of the positive outcomes of the restorative approach, teachers generally find that this is time well spent. Restorative practices also challenge teachers to think of students as individuals to be helped, rather than problems in my class, and for some, changing this mind-set takes time. Restorative practices also challenge traditional notions of teacher authority.

There are also worthwhile benefits to schools and school leaders. Restorative practices help schools become the kind of places that principals, teachers and Boards of Trustees

want them to be: places where there is a peaceful, respectful and ordered environment where students feel valued and able to engage successfully in their learning. While implementing and leading restorative practices can be a burden for school leaders, they also report a deep sense of satisfaction in the nature of this work and feel it is making important differences in the lives of many.

Restorative practices also offer benefits to parents, not only in contributing to a positive school culture, but also for the type of interaction they promote when there is an issue that needs to be dealt with. The restorative conference is a fair and transparent process which does not stigmatise parents and can help resolve situations that they too are experiencing with their children.

Restorative practices have the power to transform school culture. I certainly believe that this values-based approach is the way of the future, as schools do their best to work towards the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum of producing confident, connected, actively involved citizens who are lifelong learners.

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