

# **Sabbatical Research Project**

## **Restorative Justice Principles suited to the primary setting of St Joseph's School Feilding.**

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**Restorative Justice Practices**

**Acknowledgement:**

Thank you to the St Joseph's School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and the M.O.E. for making available sabbatical leave for principals.

Having the opportunity to delve deeply into an area of both personal and professional interest as well as returning to school refreshed and revitalised has been truly valuable.

Thank you to my Deputy Principal who so capably ran the school in my absence.

I would like to acknowledge my professional colleagues who I visited for their support in answering my questions and who gave me their time to share their experiences of restorative practice and what this looked like in their schools.

## **Purpose:**

I wanted the opportunity to gather information about three main ideas.

1. Extend my understanding on the philosophy and practices that underpin restorative justice.
2. View restorative justice practices in action in various school settings, to read literature based on the topic and attend courses by leaders with expertise in this field.
3. To explore how particular schools implemented Restorative Justice practices into their schools and over time develop our own school culture that encourages students to take responsibility for their actions, relate in an empathetic manner to their peers and develop skills necessary to deal with conflict in an appropriate and constructive manner.

## **Background and Rationale**

The behaviour management system in our school is based around our "We CARE" values programme. C.A.R.E = Community, Acceptance, Respect and Excellence.

Teachers explicitly teach what the "We CARE" programme means in terms of the way all members of the school community treat each other and the environment and how students engage in their learning.

These values underpin our beliefs about the importance of lifelong learning, responsible citizenship and the importance of community.

Both staff and students have a shared understanding of appropriate behaviours and a consistent approach to behaviour management is utilized across the school.

However on review of the Behaviour Management Policy and Procedures it was identified by staff that the current practices were not making much difference to ceasing unacceptable behaviour. The current approach was seen as punitive and not delivering the kind of outcomes we are seeking; more young people doing the right thing most of the time, young people who are thoughtful about the impact of their own behaviour on others, and who take responsibility for their actions and the development of a sense of community and connectedness.

It was decided that as a school we needed to explore restorative practices as a way to pass greater responsibility to our students by encouraging their voice or control over what happens to resolve issues.

Embedding restorative practices across the school will create a positive impact on the culture of a school where relationships are paramount. Restorative justice seeks to heal and put right the wrongs.

Punitive approaches to behaviour management focus on the individual rather than the context in which the behaviour occurred. Frequently the punishment does not concern itself with the impact on the relationship or the emotional harm done to others or of the possibility of support needed to change behaviour.

All stakeholders will be encouraged to contribute, be heard and listened to, take responsibility for their actions when mistakes are made and work toward finding solutions that repair the harm and restore the relationship.

### **Methodology:**

After contacting international expert Margaret Thorsborne who kindly suggested people and schools I might contact, I identified schools that I wished to visit.

I tried to choose a range of schools, from rural to urban, across the decile range and representative of both primary and intermediate sectors. Most schools were nationally recognised as well equipped as users of restorative practice while some were still working toward that goal.

### **Schools visited**

| <b>School</b>                   | <b>Roll</b> | <b>Year Level</b> | <b>Decile</b> | <b>Contact person</b>       |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Kaitao Middle School, Rotorua   | 400         | 7-8               | 2             | Rory O'Rourke / Kim Solomon |
| Pillians Point School, Tauranga | 370         | 1-6               | 9             | Theresa Rosborough          |
| Castlecliff School, Wangai      | 115         | 1-6               | 1             | Kath Martin                 |
| West Eyrton School, Rangiora    | 146         | 1-8               | 9             | Jillian Gallagher           |
| Cust School, R.D.1 Cust.        | 123         | 1-8               | 10            | Robert Schuyt               |

### **Findings from the Readings**

Restorative Justice Principles have been widely used in Australia, NZ and the UK for a number of years in addressing challenging or disruptive behaviour. Restorative justice is

focused on needs: those of victims, of communities and of wrongdoers. (Howard Zehir, 2002). It seeks to heal and put right the wrongs and this process maximizes the opportunities for exchange of information, participation, dialogue and mutual consent between the victim and the wrongdoer.

Underpinning restorative principles is a set of values that guide the interrelated parts of the school - teaching, learning and the nurturing of relationships. These values – respect, participation, honesty, humility, interconnectedness, accountability and empowerment are critical and schools adopting restorative practices make a commitment to these values. Developing a common understanding of restorative values also is a way of bringing together people of different backgrounds and supports their feeling that the system is their own rather than imposed upon them.

Students are unable to learn effectively if the relationships in a school are not positive. In a restorative approach those individuals involved in a conflict, whether they be teacher and student, student and student, school and parent or even a whole class - are the key stakeholders in the process of resolution. A restorative approach puts the onus for problem solving on the people involved. **If you are involved in the problem, you are involved in the solution.** ( Moxon, Skudder & Peters, 2006).

“Successful implementation and sustainability of a restorative philosophy is the realization that this means organization and cultural change “ Morrison 2003.

## **Findings from School Visits.**

The schools I visited while on sabbatical had been involved in restorative practices from between 1 – 4 years. All schools were enthusiastic and actively promoting restorative justice principles. Some schools utilized the mini chats for outside behaviours only, with duty teachers responding to issues occurring in the playground. In the classroom these schools still employed the assertive discipline approach.

Three of the schools utilized the restorative approach right throughout their school. It was not a manner of behaviour management but more a culture that imbued the whole school. One school referred to it as “a community of care” where all in the school took responsibility for issues and working through them to ensure positive relationships.

All schools that I visited were very clear about the values that were part of their school cultures. These were explicitly explored with students, visually displayed in areas around the school and was part of the everyday language used in conversation between teachers and students.

The values and the principles of restorative justice strongly linked to the vision for the school. Sometimes restorative justice was specifically mentioned in the charter and the annual plan, with some schools giving extra information to parents via their websites.

For many schools the introduction of the restorative approach has meant a review of many of the significant policies. The most common change occurred with regard to the behaviour management policy that showed the move from a punitive approach to a restorative approach.

All the schools that I had contact with had been assisted through the RTLB service with regard to training and implementing this approach. This had been seen as invaluable.

Different schools took different approaches with meeting with their communities in order to explain the systems and philosophy around restorative justice. Some met in a face to face meeting with parents, while others sent out weekly newsletters feeding information slowly to parents. Most schools reported that parent feedback was positive. Some teachers reported that initially it was considered time consuming, but over time teachers were taking greater responsibility for managing the relationships of the students in their classes.

In discussion with the schools it was considered that since the implementation of restorative practices there had been a reduction in behaviour management incidents, a greater sense of community and sense of calmness within the school. Discussions with Principals confirmed the importance of having a shared vision and staff buy in to such an approach.

In order to achieve this, support and staff training is an obvious requirement. Creating a culture that is caring and accountability by all members of the school community is necessary.

### Courses attended

| Name of Course  | Facilitator         | Course duration |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| Rethinking School Discipline: An introduction to Restorative Practices in Schools | Margaret Thorsborne | 1 day           |
| Remaining Calm in the face of the unmanagables!                                   | Margaret Ross       | 1 day           |
| “Why We Bully”  | Robert Pereira      | 1 day           |
| Restorative Practices in Schools. Facilitator Training.                           | Margaret Thorsborne | 3 days          |

### Findings from the Courses

At the end of 2011 when I was embarking on thinking about planning my sabbatical I attended a 1 day course facilitated by **Margaret Thorsborne on Rethinking School Discipline**. This provided me with a means of how to reframe our discipline policy to one of a relationship policy. Implementing a programme such as this in our school I believed would provide our students with the skills for building better relationships, provide greater engagement in learning and assist students with the development of important and social and emotional competence.

Early in 2012 I attended a course run by **Margaret Ross** entitled **Remaining calm in the face of the unmanageables!** It was a down to earth day with a realistic message about getting the best out of students and forming positive relationships.

**Robert Pereira** is an educational consultant who travels working with school, teachers and students addressing the question **“Why we Bully.”** He discusses the core themes of why both girls and boys bully – to understand what drives them to engage in behaviours that they already know are outlawed in every school and by every adult. As adults and teachers we need to educate and socialise our children into new ways of behaving. Much of this is associated with new ways of THINKING about difference and differences.

The final course I attended was with Margaret Thorsborne as facilitator and this was one of the most stimulating and worthwhile courses I have attended. The course centered around providing theoretical and practical information about restorative practices in a range of contexts. This training involved numerous opportunities to be involved in different scenarios using role-plays that were structured and utilized the scripted conversations. This was very worthwhile in allowing the writer to become confident in this area.

## **Implications**

Embedding a restorative approach within our school is going to involve a shift in thinking. For many – staff and parents it will challenge their beliefs about current practices in behaviour management. It will involve staff development, reading and talking to colleagues about our fundamental beliefs about relationships and the values considered important in our school.

I believe that the restorative approach can be used at many levels in our school – from minor playground and classroom incidents to more serious and on going issues. St Joseph's, over the last couple of years has been involved in initiatives that I believe will support the implementation of restorative practice. Staff have attended a research project run by Dr Shane Harvey on Creating a Warm Emotional Classroom Climate, all class teachers and students have been involved in circle time and half our staff have been involved in the Incredible Years Programme for Teachers.

In reality the implementation of this approach is going to take time and we envisage that over the next 24 months we will be constantly sharing ideas, trialing aspects of the approach and reviewing what is working well and what we will have to continue to work on.

## **In the future:**

- Staff will be involved in training, information sessions for parents and unpacking of the approach for our students.
- Continue to review policies and procedures so that have a restorative flavour.
- Investigate availability of facilitator training for senior management
- Develop an action plan for 2012.

## **Conclusion**

Positive relationships between students and teachers assist the way learning happens. There is a decrease of incidents and inappropriate behaviours and students have greater opportunities to learn. If the relationship is not right the pupils will not engage in learning. We wish to help students build strong relationships and have the ability to reflect, repair and reconnect when something goes wrong. This is a life skill that we all need. We, at St Joseph's, have embarked on this journey where through experimentation and adaption St Joseph's will become a truly restorative school.

## **Bibliography**

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