

New Zealand Teachers Study Award 2014

Sabbatical Report
By
Chris Dibben

Sabbatical Report from Chris Dibben:

Title: *What and how do lower decile schools and schools from lower socio economic areas in the United Kingdom, actively engage their learners and community into learning which contributes to improving and raising student achievement?*

Author: Chris Dibben Principal of Tawhero School Wanganui

Date: Sabbatical Term 3 2014

Acknowledgements:

NZ Teachers Study Awards Since thanks and appreciation to the New Zealand Principal and Teachers Study Awards personnel for allowing me to have the time to reflect and refresh over term 3 2014 to research and investigate the effective engagement practices used in lower decile schools in the United Kingdom.

Tawhero School Board of Trustees, Staff and Community for their on going and positive support to ensure we have a community school where there is an atmosphere of respect and positivity and that each child succeeds and achieves.

Collingwood Primary School, Hull, England Staff, Management team and Community for their sharing of information which has lead to an amazing and positive transformation for the whole Hull community.

Purpose:

The aim of the study is to investigate and share the knowledge, skills and effective practices of successful and effective leaders of schools in lower socio economic areas in the United Kingdom that engage their learners – students, parents, community and raise student achievement. The completed study will hopefully assist and inspire principals and leaders in New Zealand schools and enhance school professional cultures on how to best engage with their students and parents that ultimately leads to improving student achievement .

Background and Rationale:

Background Information on Tawhero School:

Tawhero School is decile one school in Wanganui. I have the pleasure of being the tumuaki at Tawhero School since October 2001. We have had an interesting journey with lots of successes and improvements, all for the benefit of our tamariki, staff and parents. We are celebrating having an ERO review in August, four and a half years since our last review. We look forward to some confirmation of good practice but also to some next step ideas to continue our journey of better outcomes for our taonga/tamariki.

Tawhero School has implemented a range of programmes designed to improve student engagement and achievement. Some of these interventions include The Tawhero Connection Mentoring Programme, Foundations of Literacy Programme , Boys Education class, SWAP programme and the TAWHERO values programme. All of which have contributed to better educational outcomes for our tamariki.

Tawhero School is also in its third year of implementing the MOE Positive Behaviour for Learning Programme with amazing success. Children and staff now effectively and more engaged in learning and teaching, with the data showing a major decrease in negative and minor issues for students and staff. After considerable effort a positive and respectful learning environment exists for all.

Tawhero School has the privilege of also being the lead school for RTLB Cluster 25 which has had a smooth transition and where we are now focusing on building capability and capacity in the team to ensure we best meet the needs of referred students, teachers and schools in our area.

Tawhero School is also a satellite school for students with severe and extremely high needs, as well as having ORRS students mainstreamed throughout the kura. Tawhero

School is also in the final part of the process with consultation with our Pasifika community, and we are now building an Early Childhood Centre to cater for students 0-5 Years of age with a focus on Pasifika and Asian cultures. This addition compliments our focus of providing a facility of learning for all members of our community.

Tawhero School is also providing learning opportunities for parents and community members. In association with Whanganui Learning Centre we have been providing Literacy and learning programmes based upon parents needs at Tawhero during the school day. We are also providing a Mums with pre-schoolers programme focusing on sharing how young children learn, what and how we teach their children, and also develop programmes based upon the mums needs as well. We have also been providing programmes for effective parenting, including Incredible Years, All About Me... and regular Monday learning sessions for parents about cooking, pastimes, relationships building etc in our community room.

It was always the intention that the information collated in this research would also contribute to the students who attend Tawhero School and their whanau and community, and to making Tawhero School an even more effective learning environment.

A large amount of my time was spent upon researching the wide and varied information and readings prior to deciding upon worthy and valuable leaders of schools in lower socio-economic areas in the United Kingdom. This initial study took considerable time and effort, but was important for me in this process so that the results were valuable for our school and community. The desire was to decide upon a leader and school where significant change and improvement had occurred that had made major contributions to the students, staff, parents and community. With such a wide array of information and research available it took considerable time to carefully select a leader/school where significant positive contribution had achieved and made a real positive difference to the students and community. The importance of engaging learners, students, parents, community is vital for the effectiveness of schools in lower socio-economic areas and that this engagement also contributes to improved student achievement.

Associated with lower socio- economic schools generally is the fact that interactions with students and other personnel from schools can seriously impact on student engagement with learning, student achievement and parents/community engagement. When these factors are met there is a greater opportunity for student engagement in learning, positive interactions with others and an atmosphere of trust, respect for others and positivity for learning.

The massive positive changes made at Collingwood Primary School in Hull and in fact the whole city had lead me to share the information and journey the school and community have made in implementing and developing Restorative Practices. These practices have lead to huge changes in lifting student achievement and and community engagement, but also to the community level

Collingwood School in Hull, came out of government evaluators as a special measures school quickly, and two years later when OFSTED inspectors came back to see us they judged the school to be "outstanding." The lead inspector emphasised with the phrase "with the realistic potential to become exceptional."

Information on Restorative Practices implementation in Collingwood Primary School; and the city of Hull, United Kingdom:

History, Findings and Benefits from their School leader - Mrs. Estelle MacDonald:

Estelle MacDonald In 2004, as a new headteacher, took on a school in “special measures.” At the time I felt the community of the school was in crisis — there were disconnected relationships, people in conflict and little coherence or shared vision of how to move forward.

We worked hard at Collingwood to address these issues to provide the right environment for learning for everyone. We shared a compelling vision based on high challenge and high support and the use of circles in classes. I recognize now that many of the tools we used were restorative and certainly our philosophy was a restorative one, even though we lacked the vocabulary to describe it as such.

Collingwood School, located in an area affected by acute economic and social changes, was once considered a school in crisis. High crime rates and overt racism are common experiences for students attending the school. The school struggled with issues concerning student discipline and other methods of creating a safe school environment. Restorative practices provided the mechanism for doing just that.

In this short teachers and students describe the use of circles each morning and afternoon as a way for students to check in and talk about how they are feeling that day. One staff member describes the process as helping the children to develop a vocabulary to express their emotions and learn more about taking responsibility for their behaviour.

A teacher describes how the simple change of asking “What happened?” instead of “Why?” created significant improvements in her interaction with the children. “What happened?” allows the child to speak without automatically fearing punishment, whereas “Why?” causes a defensive reaction.

With the continued use of Restorative Practice our children are becoming equipped to deal with their own feelings and managing their relationships within the school and therefor the school is a safe and happy place to be where any problems are dealt with in a mature and effective way.

Restorative questions used are:

What happened?

What were you thinking about at the time?

What have your thoughts been since?

Who has been affected by what you did?

In what way have they been affected?

What do you think needs to happen next?

Students describe circles using words such as "respect" and "safe place".

One parent described how his son had expressed a lot of anger and was getting in fights. In response to one fight, the school held a circle that involved the participants in the fight, parents and teachers. The father describes how this process allowed everyone

to have a say, find a solution, and walk away with a good feeling. He also describes changes he has seen in his son's behaviour after the circle.

Another student describes how participating in circles has helped him, and how his family now uses the process in responding to issues.

At Collingwood, restorative practices are used at every level of the school, including among staff members. Each morning they meet in a circle as well. While described as lighthearted, the circle also provides teachers an opportunity to seek input from colleagues about issues they face. One teacher explains that her fear of making mistakes has reduced as her feeling of support from her co-workers and supervisors has grown through these practices.

Another teacher describes how she feels more in control of her own emotions as she responds to students and their conflicts (with each other and with her). She feels that the students actually listen to her, and the students feel the same about her. This mutual respect has had an effect on the education environment and has resulted in increased work output and improved quality by the students.

Despite our huge successes at Collingwood and in Hull, it became apparent to me that there were some ways of dealing with challenging behaviour that we hadn't even thought of, and more importantly, there were children and young people in Hull whom we were letting down badly.

Estelle sent an email to all schools in Hull, inviting them to a briefing on what was discovered about Restorative Practices. .

I will never forget that cold December night when I put out 30 chairs in my school hall and over 100 people turned up! My intention was to canvass some support to run a one-day conference where Ted Wachel and (IIRP training and consulting director) Bob Costello could come to Hull and introduce us to restorative practices. The interest was so great that we ended up running three one-day conferences back to back. It was exciting. It seemed it wasn't just me who thought this would help us in Hull. The headteachers drove the demand for the initial three oneday conferences, and they were very successful. One headteacher in particular, Chris Straker, the head of Endeavour High School, was very interested in adopting restorative practices, and I talked to Chris about it and arranged for him to meet and talk with Ted.

Ted persuaded Chris to adopt a whole-school training model, and two months later Ted flew back to Hull to work with the British IIRP team to deliver a whole-school training to the 120 staff at Endeavour. Chris and his staff started their own restorative journey; this has been documented in the film made on Endeavour. At Collingwood we continued our journey. The conferencing model added much to our practice, and we worked hard on refining and furthering what we knew worked already but using some new tools and experiences that we learned through IIRP training and consultation.

As we improved relationships the benefits happened quickly: reduced disruption in lessons, reduced lost breaks or privileges, reduced racial incidents, improved attendance both of staff and pupils, improved punctuality and improved family engagement. These results then impacted on even more significant figures relating to pupil progress and attainment.

The quality of speaking and listening has improved standards in literacy, and greater pupil and family engagement has improved attendance and achievement, while also significantly decreasing our level of complaints and conflict in the community.

We accessed funding a two-year project in Riverside (an inner-city area of Hull) on restorative practices. This was well supported by the IIRP both nationally and internationally. We set up a small consortium of skilled professionals in the form of the Hull Centre for Restorative Practice, a very small team of us that included myself, Chris Straker, Mark Finnis, Paul Carlile and latterly Jo Faulkner. Then we began to work on spreading the word on restorative practices and offering training and consultancy to not just schools but all organizations in the Riverside area that “touch the lives of children.” Our aim was to create as near as possible a restorative community where all professionals, be they teachers, social workers, health professionals, police, youth offending team — anyone dealing with children and young people — did so in a restorative way.

We needed to enable practitioners and organizations to articulate clearly the rationale for their practice and provide a common framework to improve relationships: establish rights, accountabilities and responsibilities to shared community values. We wanted to improve behaviour and attitudes and provide explicit tools within a defined framework to challenge unacceptable behaviour, resolve conflict and repair harm. It was also our aim to use restorative practices not only to bind organizations together in a common explicit purpose, but also to bind professionals across services.

We all realized this was a massive challenge, but we had an inspirational team backed by Nigel and his senior officers. We quickly established who were the champions of restorative practices and set up a management group of key movers and shakers from each area of children’s services — people who not only “really got it” but had the enthusiasm to drive it in their organization and, crucially, decisionmaking power to make the changes necessary.

This group of people has been fundamental to the success of the Riverside project. We realized quickly that just training was not enough. We had to build up support structures to support the practice emerging in organizations. We also knew we had to work with the IIRP to quickly build capacity in Hull, so we began to train key people at the highest level to establish a strong training team that represented all organizations.

We worked on the mantra “invest in the best.” The cream certainly did rise to the top, and I was inspired by some outstanding practitioners who committed hours of personal time and effort to improve their practice and upskill themselves quickly. We offered universal training to all organizations and then targeted leaders with leadership training and lead practitioners with further training and support. We set up support networks initially for headteachers but then for lead practitioners and for the police. We provided the targeted support in stages, and whilst focusing our efforts in Riverside, we didn’t refuse training or support to anyone outside Riverside.

Early impacts were evident in schools particularly quickly. Across the nine other schools in Riverside in phase one of the project, we saw significant reductions in classroom disruption (79 percent), exclusions from break (92 percent), days lost to fixed-term exclusions (81 percent), reported verbal abuse to staff (79 percent), reported physical abuse pupil to pupil (80 percent), incidents at lunchtime (82 percent) and referrals to the headteacher or senior leadership team (92 percent).

Headteachers reported that the climate in their schools had never been better, that staff, pupils, parents and partners to the school noticed the difference, were happier and more productive. In January of this year we trained 12 young people to be trainers in restorative practices, and these young people have helped train other children in restorative practices, as well as running circles in primary schools around transition and bullying.

About 18 months into the project the excellent engagement and impacts in schools led us to start the families project. This was an extension of the Riverside restorative practices project. It was intended to provide a way to drive restorative practices even deeper into Riverside schools by working with the hardest to reach children and their families.

The idea grew from a very successful pilot at Collingwood during year one of the project, where a child in year six with attendance, behaviour and achievement issues moved from disengagement, nonattendance and disruptive behaviour to 100-percent attendance and successful happy engagement, ultimately leading to improved achievement. What is also

notable about this story is that as a result of her child's success, mum managed to go back to work for the first time in 15 years, and her new self-esteem and pride in her achievements is truly heartwarming.

We asked Riverside heads to identify their hardest-to-reach children, choosing children with attendance, behaviour or achievement issues, and heads identified a key worker for the project worker to work with. The intention was to work with the school's nominated key worker to model restorative practices in the family and to support them in their initial home visits. In addition the team acted as a liaison with key workers in the identified support services.

Each school was assigned a social worker, and a direct link to family group conferencing service was provided to families who could benefit from the FGC service. The impact of this project in a short space of time has been fantastic — initial data indicates impressive improvements in attendance, engagement and positive changes in behaviour, but I think what moves me most are the individual life-changing stories, which families and children have reported as a result of these processes. Like the six-year old child who attended school less than 50 percent of the time, and when she did, she was in diapers; she now attends 100 percent of the time and without the diapers! Or the child who could not work in his class because he was so disruptive; he has gone from zero-percent time in class to 100-percent engagement in class. Or the sisters who were elective mutes in school and the family who refused to engage to discuss the issues, now verbal, happy participants in school life, with parents who engage and interact with school regularly.

It is not just schools, though, that have enjoyed great successes. The police in Hull are great advocates and drivers of restorative practices. Again there are some impressive stories and impacts. In the last year 19 neighbourhood disputes involving juveniles and eight neighbourhood disputes involving adults have been resolved using restorative conferencing, as have 13 offences of criminal damage, shop theft and harassment involving juvenile offenders. There are have also been a number of occasions where restorative practice has been used to deal with neighbourhood disputes, but they are not recorded formally.

In addition, on a number of occasions police officers have successfully supported restorative conferences in Riverside schools. Out of 27 recorded offences by juveniles

dealt with by restorative conferencing rather than a formal criminal justice route, to date none of these offenders have received a further criminal justice sanction for an offence committed after the RP intervention. The Youth Offending Team who were one of the first in the city to embrace restorative practices have led significant developments in the service. There has been effective cross-service working with the police, which in recent months has led to the YOT having a permanent presence at the police station as part of a triage process. This process means that following the arrest of a young person, the gravity of the offence is assessed on a three-point scale and for gravities of one or two, a restorative intervention takes place. This is followed by a full assessment of the YOT team and diversionary intervention and support.

Between 1st July and 9th July, 41 young people were brought into custody as a result of the triage process. Four went into criminal disposal; the remainder were offered a restorative intervention. Outcomes are presently being monitored and evaluated.

There are many more positive stories to tell. A children's home using restorative practices reports an 85 percent reduction in call-outs to the police, and there is a great story of a children's home just beginning to use restorative practices, making a call out to the police and the police arriving and refusing to arrest the child until a circle had been done by the staff. They offered to come back if they couldn't sort it! Needless to say it wasn't necessary!

The stories keep coming in, yet we know we still have a long way to go. I remain constantly inspired by the professionals I am privileged to work with. Over the past two years I have been able to work with a wide range of agencies, and their commitment to the mission is truly inspiring.

As you may have gathered by now, I am committed to Hull. I believe in Hull. I live within the city boundaries, and my children are educated in our city schools. I have a big investment in its future and the future of our young people. I believe we have a duty to create an opportunity and give children the tools to take responsibility for their future and the future of the city. I believe restorative practices can help create the right climate for children to have a voice, to develop the ability to build relationships, to resolve theirs and others' conflicts, and to build better communities where they can feel safe and confident to learn and grow into responsible, successful and honourable citizens.

Hull is fortunate to have this opportunity. Hull is moving now on to an even greater challenge — to create the world's first restorative city!

It is intended that the impacts of a city committed to restoring community in a disconnected world, and that our children, and the children whose lives I touch, can move forward with hope in their hearts and the skills and knowledge to make Hull, Britain and then the world a better place.

Conclusions:

Restorative practices: It's important to emphasise that Restorative Practice is a way to be rather than something to do, or in an organisation, 'the way we do things here'. It's not something which is done sometimes, or under particular circumstances. It is not a behaviour management tool, and it is not just about disputes and incidents. This is not

always clear as many people's first contact with it is from hearing about or experiencing Restorative Justice, where typically offender and victim(s) are brought together after an incident to discuss what happened and find a way forward. As a way to deal with incidents more effectively than normal processes allow, Restorative Justice has many merits, and is included in its entirety on any Restorative Practice implementation, but it is only one element of Restorative Practice, and is not the complete picture.

Restorative practice provides clear and practical actions and behaviours which initiate, support, strengthen and, where necessary, repair relationships between individuals and groups. It promotes understanding, trust, respect and thoughtfulness and requires that people understand that every one of their choices and actions affects others, and also that people are responsible for their choices and actions and can be held accountable for them. It recognises that a community will work together to make things as good as they can be for themselves whilst minimising negatives, and it encourages dialogue about how to do this.

Correctly implemented, a restorative community will spend far more of its time on proactive, community and relationship building activities than it does on reactive, corrective activities. Where these are required, however, a spectrum of approaches is available to suit everything from 5 year olds wishing to solve a playground dispute to law enforcement officers dealing with the most serious crimes.

A facilitated restorative meeting provides a forum where individuals and groups can work together and improve their mutual understanding about an issue and reach the best available solution; soon you can take a look at the stories section for details of what this can achieve, examples being ending long-running neighbour disputes, solutions enabling children to remain with family members, and resolving anti-social behaviour issues.

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