



# RESPECTFUL SCHOOLS

## Restorative Practices in Education

A Summary Report

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# PREFACE

Schools are grappling with many issues; not just educational outcomes focused around children's learning, teaching professional practice and school environment, but also community expectations, and financial accountability. Nevertheless, a basic concern for all schools has to be children's engagement with their school. When children and their families are committed and feel that they belong, and contribute to the life and culture of their school environment, it increases the likelihood that they will enjoy other positive health and social outcomes.

Violence in schools is one factor that can increase disengagement. Children and young people's experiences of bullying has received lots of media and public attention recently – although this may reflect the fact that children are now more likely to report it. We simply do not know if there is more violence within schools, more violence within our communities and families, or if we are tolerating less violence than before and responding differently to this violence.

This report is a timely reminder of how we can work differently with children and young people in educational settings to make them more resilient. Restorative justice practices in schools are at the heart of repairing relationships between students, as well as their family, school and community, which have far reaching positive social and educational outcomes. They enable schools and communities to work together rather than being forced into adversarial relationships through traditional disciplinary processes.

Maori and Pasifika children, along with refugee and low socio-economic children are currently more likely to be excluded from their schools and also experience levels of violence in school and home settings that must be addressed and stopped. Restorative practices such as those adopted by the schools described here, demonstrate principles of inclusion and democracy that increase the chances of these children whom we cannot afford to lose from the education system.

What happens in education is both a reflection of, and a response to what is happening in our wider society. They are inherently bound up together. How schools, teachers, boards of trustees, students and their families respond to the issues they confront when things go wrong for children and young people in educational settings is a challenge. There is pressure on boards of trustees to 'get it right' in their disciplinary processes, with increased pressure on lay people who may have little training in this area.

This report provides evidence of the need to build inclusive school communities that allow children and young people the chance to get the education they need and deserve. Doing this is not easy. It would be easier to exclude some children and not have to manage the demands that their needs place on the system. However, this forces other schools, including alternative education providers and the youth justice system, to then have to deal with these young people. There are far too many young people ending up in our youth justice system and this represents significant costs for these young people and for our society.

It is possible, this report argues, to build inclusive and respectful school cultures that actually improve all aspects of school functioning so that staff are empowered to teach children and young people, children are empowered to learn, and most importantly, children are able to continue to participate in education and therefore have hope for their future. We do not need to re-invent the wheel. There are many schools doing precisely this and many passionate advocates for children and young people who have dedicated their work to making this happen.

This resource provides a beacon for learning for other schools, so that we can build the best possible and most positive environment for all our children and young people.

We all have a role in this.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'C. Kiro'.

**Dr Cindy Kiro**

Children's Commissioner

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# THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in developing practices based on restorative justice to respond to the behaviour problems and under-achievement of students in schools.

This report summarises for school principals, members of boards of trustees and parents, findings from a study of restorative practices in New Zealand secondary schools. It provides information on practices and examples of how they have been introduced and used. It also looks at key themes and challenges in the introduction of restorative practices in schools. It is hoped that this information will be useful for members of school communities interested in implementing restorative approaches within their own schools and communities.

# AUTHORS AND THEIR METHODS

This work has been carried out by Gabrielle Maxwell and Sean Buckley from the Institute of Policy Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in partnership with the Office of the Children's Commissioner. This report provides a summary of their work.

Gabrielle Maxwell is well known for her work on restorative practices in the justice sector and brings a wealth of knowledge and long-standing commitment to the implementation of these strategies to improve outcomes for young people. Sean Buckley is a post-graduate student with Victoria University, employed to assist with this study.

Fifteen secondary schools that have introduced restorative practices over recent years agreed to participate in this research by completing a questionnaire through phone interviews and/or face-to-face discussions. Five of these schools have been selected as case studies to provide in-depth examples of successful practice in a variety of different settings.

# NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

International conventions, national laws and current policies all require that the State provide all children with access to education. In practice, there are barriers to equality: attendance rates have been problematic and suspensions and expulsion of those students who misbehave soared in the 1990s (Kerlake et al, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2001). Furthermore, international comparisons show that although New Zealand children are high achievers on average compared with other OECD countries, there remains a proportion of students who significantly underachieve (Kovacs, 1998; PISA, 2004). Maori in particular remain over-represented in school failure rates (Ministry of Education, 2004b).

There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for the high rates of educational failure. Relatively high truancy rates, poor attendance and transient families are certainly factors. But there is also evidence to suggest that the use of exclusionary and punitive methods of responding to behaviour issues is also a factor (Skiba et al. 2003). Over recent years, the relatively high use of expulsion and suspensions has characterised a number of schools.

The Ministry of Education has documented these problems and has developed a number of new initiatives that are designed to respond to the key issues identified (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005; Ministry of Education web

sites'). The new initiatives include more effective systems of collecting and using attendance information, developing more effective responses to truancy, improving relations between schools and communities, reducing suspensions and developing better ways of engaging the most alienated students in the classroom. New Zealand appears to be entering a new period of educational reform and innovation.

The changes described here are largely the result of schools using the autonomy granted to them through the Education Act 1989 to develop their own strategies for ensuring the education of their students according to their perceived needs. At the same time, the schools often work with the support of the Ministry, academics (Drewery, 2003, 2005; Bishop, 2003) and others, in developing new ways of reducing absenteeism, truancy and exclusions. In doing so, they are developing ways of managing problem behaviour and enhancing educational achievement; responding more appropriately to Maori; and more effectively engaging students, parents and communities in the educational process. As a result, new educational approaches and strategies are emerging that involve the use of new practices promoting values and goals built around respect, inclusion and restoration.

# WHAT IS RESTORATIVE PRACTICE?

A number of schools throughout New Zealand are introducing practices that can be described as restorative because they are consistent with a set of values recognised as underpinning restorative justice theory and practice. Importantly these practices aim to change the whole school culture – not simply aspects of that culture – by building such values into the school's foundational ideology as well as its daily practice creating a 'climate of care'. By this we mean a school environment based on core restorative principles of inclusion, the repair of harm, and reintegration, reinforced by strong support networks.

All of the schools in the study have adopted restorative conferences as a strategy for dealing with relatively serious problems but all have also adopted other restorative methods to deal with minor matters. Restorative conferences are a way of responding to serious problems by bringing together all those who are involved to find a way of acknowledging wrongdoing, attempting to repair any harm that was done and finding a way of reintegrating the wrongdoer back into the school community. The use of restorative conferences in schools is modelled on the use of the family group conference in youth justice and the restorative justice conference for adults.

## The restorative conference in schools

### How does it work:

- It is used to respond to serious disciplinary problems
- Involves a trained facilitator arranging and holding a meeting attended by all affected: the student, their family, teachers and others affected by the behaviour
- Discusses the problem and relevant background factors
- Develops a plan to repair harm and for the student's future.

### What are the potential outcomes:

- Acknowledgement of any wrongdoing
- A proposal to repair any harm that was caused
- A plan for the educational future of the student
- A plan for any other needed services or support for the young person, their family and others affected by the harm that was caused.

As well as the restorative conference, schools are using a number of other strategies. The most common strategy is a 'restorative chat' where one staff member and a student (sometimes also including the victim) discuss what can be done to repair the harm that had been done and resolve the problem. Other practices include the use of mini-conferences involving fewer participants in more minor matters, developing a restorative classroom as a way of managing in-class problems, and using a restorative thinking room where the student works through a series of restorative questions in order to consider what has happened and what he/she might do to respond constructively.

# CASE STUDIES

## Tahi College: Case Study 1

### Background

Tahi College<sup>2</sup> is a state run, co-educational and multi-cultural decile one secondary school. The last Education Review Office (ERO) report to examine the school in May of 2004 put the roll at 460 students; 30% Samoan, 22% Maori, 14% Cook Island Maori, 11% Tokelauan, 6% NZ European/Pakeha, 6% Asian and 11% other ethnicities. The city in which Tahi College is located has a rich Maori history and is ethnically diverse, with the majority of its students coming from two close suburbs. In response to a number of serious educational concerns, including high rates of truancy and behavioural problems, Tahi College began introducing restorative practices in the late 1990s.

### Change Process

The first step was to bring together students, parents and staff in separate meetings to discuss their concerns. A school steering committee was then formed to implement change. The committee developed four clear goals:

- For the school to function and operate through a culture of respect;
- To improve outcomes for all involved in the school;
- To create a positive learning environment for the students; and
- To utilise their resources effectively.

The school's management then developed a three-point value system based on:

- Respecting one's self and others;
- Commitment to one's self and the school community; and
- Striving for excellence in all that is undertaken.

Staff took the lead role in promulgating the ideas and beliefs that led to the embedding of the goals and values agreed upon by the committee and senior management. Overall the entire process of change has rested upon the fundamental belief that all change must first be based on respect for self, others and the greater school community.

### Restorative Practices

#### a) Support systems

Tahi College has developed an extensive support system with a number of small and large bodies charged with providing in-school support. All students can directly access these bodies, which include the school council, council subcommittees, study groups, resource teachers: learning and behaviour (RTLB's), counsellors, the senior management team and community liaison officers.

The role played by the community liaison officers (CLOs) is particularly important as they worked independently with staff, students and families. Both are well-liked and respected members of the local community and are therefore readily accepted by the students and families. They are responsible for checking and following up student absences by locating students and sorting out any problems with the students and their families. They provide ongoing mentoring to students and families where appropriate and are a resource relied upon by the school to assist with a variety of problems, especially those relating to families and the wider community. In addition, they have been trained in restorative conferencing and facilitate restorative conferences for serious problems.

## **b) Process and practice**

All disciplinary action at Tahi College is based on three core rules:

- All communication is calm and shows respect;
- Always promote strong routine and a nurturing environment; and
- Shouting, aggressive or threatening body or verbal language does not work.

The school continues to use many traditional disciplinary procedures such as detention, absentee/truancy control, and class withdrawal. These are however, being slowly phased out in favour of more restorative approaches such as a 'card system' which is used to initiate and monitor a process for resolving issues based on communication, care and respect. Coloured cards are used for infractions of varying degrees of severity and serve as a warning system. There are three levels providing graduated monitoring of classroom behaviour and attendance. The key element is that the system is based on a partnership between student and teacher and involves significant levels of pastoral care. The school also uses restorative conferences in responding to major problems. This is a highly inclusive process, involving family/whanau, caregivers, victims, offenders, relevant staff and agency members. It involves extensive preparation, is facilitated by the two trained CLOs and results in a plan which is followed-up by the CLOs.

## **Outcomes**

Tahi College has enjoyed many positive outcomes that it believes are directly attributable to its restorative philosophy and approaches.

These include:

- No exclusions/expulsions in four years
- Reduction in suspension numbers
- Reduction in absentees
- Greater community involvement
- Improved NCEA/NQF results
- An improved school climate
- Positive ERO Reports

## Rua High School: Case Study 2

### Background

Rua High School is a state run co-educational and multicultural decile six, secondary school located in an urban setting. The last ERO audit to report on the school in 2002 put the school roll at 1,894 students; with, 55% Pakeha, 20% Maori, 10% Asian, 6% Samoan, 2% Cook Island Maori, 2% Tongan, 1% Niuean and 4% other ethnicities. The school roll has expanded within the last three years to 2,500 students. The school implemented a restorative practices approach in response to high suspension and stand-down rates. This approach now shapes the school's entire climate and has given it a new image.

### Change Process

Rua High school also began with extensive consultations with members of the school community in order to identify objectives, values and principles that all could relate to. Key objectives include:

- To facilitate student *achievement* in all educational areas;
- To promote high levels of *communication* between all school members; and
- To build an *environment* conducive to holistic educational achievement founded on respect.

The school's community values statement records the school's intent to:

- Support diversity;
- Meet the needs and expectations of all community members;
- Develop well rounded students; and
- Support the principles of respect, honesty and open communication.

Rua High School provided basic training to all staff in restorative practices and has maintained a high level of restorative knowledge through extended training of selected staff members. All staff have played a critical role in embedding practice that ensures the school objectives, values, principles and philosophy are adhered to. The school's ultimate objective is the creation of a complete 'learning community' that operates on restorative principles.

### Restorative Practices

#### a) School support system:

Rua High School's support system is based on the concept that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. Support systems are designed to be accessed by any school member at any time, helping to create a learning community built on the notion that all must help each other develop. The support system itself is made up of several different bodies including:

- The classroom teacher
- Guidance counsellor
- Learning support services
- Cultural support services
- Health services
- Careers advice

#### b) Process and practices

Underpinning all Rua High School's processes and procedures for behaviour management is a code of conduct – displayed in all classrooms – that promotes interactive teaching methods, a climate of listening, mutual respect and

collaborative problem solving. These guidelines are used as a basis of discipline and in developing the general school environment.

Rua High School continues to use traditional discipline measures such as following up absentees, detention, class removal, suspension, stand-down, expulsion and exclusion. However, the school is working to phase these out in favour of more restorative approaches.

Rua High School runs a comprehensive restorative programme that aims to bring together all involved in issues, to find means to resolve issues of concern and to reintegrate those affected adversely into the school community. Methods used include; restorative conferences, the restorative chat, the restorative thinking room, the mini-restorative conference, and classroom conferencing.

## **Outcomes**

Rua High School has seen a number of positive results that it attributes to adopting a restorative approach to education. These include:

- Roll growth
- Reductions in suspensions
- Increased student retention
- Improved NCEA/NQF results
- Positive ERO reports
- Enhanced school climate

## Toru College: Case Study 3

### Background

Toru College is a coeducational and multi-cultural decile two school located in a central North Island urban centre. It includes both intermediate and secondary departments. The last ERO report to examine Toru College was undertaken when it had only a secondary department. At that time, it identified the school roll at just over 500 students; 62% Pakeha, 30% Maori, 5% Pacific, and 3% Asian. The roll in 2005 has risen to just under 750 students – largely due to its merger with the local intermediate. The school is seeking to find solutions for a variety of educational issues that have been encountered since the merger.

### Change Process

The change process has been relatively recent and is still unfolding. Toru College's overall goal is to create an environment that motivates both students and staff in all areas of life. The college aims to promote motivation through amalgamating traditional approaches to education with new approaches. Underpinning this approach are two core values:

- The need for 'unconditional respect' between all school community members; and
- The maintenance of positive 'relationships'.

In order to create a motivational environment, the school has identified a series of important objectives. These include:

- Encouraging pride in the school
- Encouraging development of pride through achievement
- Celebrating diversity
- Developing clear boundaries
- Promoting student leadership
- Valuing personal motivation
- Promoting a communal school that works together

Toru College has developed a strategic plan of implementation; setting clear points of focus and identifying short term annual goals.

### Restorative Practice

#### a) School support systems

The most unique characteristic of Toru College is the placement of the support system within the overall school structure on a par with the other two wings of middle and senior school. The head of support services has equal status with the heads of the middle and senior school in the management structure, and is responsible for coordinating all staff, agencies and bodies operating within or alongside of the school in providing support.

Such bodies, agencies and people include:

- Outside providers committee
- Learning and behaviour support committee
- Training and support guidance counsellor
- Careers advisor

- Rangatahi support personnel (for Maori students)
- Resource teachers learning and behaviour (RTLB)
- Social workers
- Teacher aides
- Truancy officers
- Special education needs coordinator (SENCO)
- Public nurses

Toru College has the use of off-site facilities where students can have space away from the school community in times of heightened stress. There is an activity centre and a new unit for year 7 and 8 students. Both are used for short-term placements to allow students having problems to have time out before returning to mainstream education in the school. In addition, it runs a transition pilot project to assist in integrating primary students when they enter the college.

### **b) Process and practices**

Toru College's behaviour management plan primarily focuses on positive reinforcement through acknowledging 'what students are doing right.' This principle under-pins a three-tier approach to behaviour management which involves:

- Creating clear behaviour management goals so that students can practice self-discipline;
- Outlining clear behaviour protocol for teachers to ensure their responses are fair and balanced; and
- As appropriate, adopting approaches that are:
  - Preventative, through positive reaffirmation;
  - Corrective, using communication to resolve issues; and
  - Supportive, creating a network of support for those involved in conflict.

These three tiers rely heavily upon each classroom's core behaviour management document, 'Our Class Behaviour Plan'. This is developed by all members of a classroom outlining rights and responsibilities. Issues that arise are first and foremost dealt with through class meetings that act as an inclusive forum for addressing conflict. As issues rise in their level of severity more individuals from the community of support are involved. Such meetings focus on 'contract plans' designed to engage the student in recognising they must take responsibility for their actions. They are designed to remove a student from a conflict area, allowing them time to consider the impact of their actions, how they could have acted differently and how they can make amends.

### **Outcomes**

Toru College has experienced slow but sure gains from the implementation of its approach to education. However, it has found that it has taken time for the school to adjust to the recent merger and to build new systems to cope with new demands. An assessment of outcomes shows:

- Advances in NCEA/NQF figures
- Higher post exclusion retention rates
- Reductions in suspensions and stand-downs
- Greater community involvement

## Wha College: Case Study 4

### Background

Wha College is a multicultural, co-educational, decile ten state secondary school located in the lower North Island. The most recent ERO report in 2004 identified a school roll of 1,057 students. Of this 75% are Pakeha, 7% Maori, 7% Asian, 5% other European, 1% Pacific Island, and 5% other ethnicities. Wha College has remained a decile ten school since the 1999 ERO report and has had a roll increase of about 15% since then. The school has been eager to develop methods for reducing suspension and stand-down figures as well as re-engaging with its local community.

### Change Process

The change process was initiated following the appointment of a new principal in 2001 and began with a charter review in 2002 – 2003. Wha College began by re-evaluating its objectives, principles and values in an attempt to better serve the needs of its students and community.

The school mission statement is: “Our purpose is highest quality education in a safe and stimulating environment” and is supported by the vision statement: “We will be satisfied when all students are challenged to achieve personal standards of excellence in an environment that encourages individual responsibility, freedom of expression and respect for the rights of others.”

Wha College also identifies 12 principles, beliefs and values core to achieving its mission. These include:

- Student learning is a priority
- Recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi partnership
- Belief in high expectations
- Achievement is based on engagement
- Importance of highly motivated and trained staff
- Value of extra-curricular activities
- Positive school relationships
- Value of success, innovation and creativity
- Value on personal independence and responsibility
- Importance of cultural diversity to learning
- Strong family relationships with school
- Resources are vital to providing education

### Resorative Practice

#### a) School support systems

Unlike the other case study schools, Wha College students are directly represented at all senior levels of management including at board and PTA meetings. One of the ways Wha College ensures its students receive support is through allowing them to operate both year level councils and an overall student council. These bodies ensure that student opinions about needs can directly influence the provision of support from senior management.

At the classroom level, it is the responsibility of the form teacher to provide assistance or arrange referrals to more senior staff for any student needing support. When problems are more serious, a larger network of support staff becomes available to students including: six deans, heads of departments, six teacher aides, learning support assistance

staff, careers advisers and two counsellors.

Following the school's tradition of empowering the students, Wha College also operates a three-tier student based peer-support system. This provides general peer-to-peer support, peer-to-peer tutoring and peer-to-peer mediation for conflict issues that arise.

### **b) Processes and practices**

Wha College remains reliant upon more traditional behaviour management measures such as detention because it has not yet developed key restorative practice tools. However, Wha College is slowly weaning itself from its reliance upon these measures to more constructive options that involve the student's family and enlisting the help of support staff as appropriate.

In the case of serious events, Wha College, like many of the other schools in this study, still relies on exclusionary behaviour management methods. However, Wha College has made an active attempt to limit the time students spend outside the education environment. This has predominantly meant continuing to rely on stand-downs in the case of serious problems but limiting the time, in most cases, to one day only.

Wha College has adopted a set of guidelines for the operation of the school that affirms that the school is "*committed to the principles of natural justice and restorative justice*" and this commits the school to trying to restore damaged relationships between students and the school, and endeavouring to reintegrate them into the school community. They are also bound to do so in a fair and just manner in accordance with the principles of natural justice. Wha College is the only school taking part in this study that had developed a written undertaking committing them to adhering to the principles of restorative justice. At the same time, unlike the other schools, Wha College has not reached a stage where its day-to-day practices operate in accord with a restorative philosophy although it has begun the transition towards such practices.

### **Outcomes**

Wha College has only recently begun to implement change, nevertheless, some positive results have been recorded:

- Improved NCEA/NQF results
- Reductions in suspensions and stand-downs
- Exclusion and expulsion numbers have dropped
- Greater retention rates or return rates among those suspended, stood down, excluded or expelled
- Greater family involvement in the school community

## Rima Centre: Case Study 5

### Background

Rima Centre is a joint initiative shared between four separate intermediate schools located in a single urban area. The programme is designed to ensure that year 7 and 8 students who are either at-risk of, or already subject to, suspension, stand-down, exclusion, truancy, disengagement and/or continual behavioural issues, remain engaged in the formal educational system by being placed temporarily in a different educational environment. The programme caters for a small number of students referred from partner schools. At any one time, these 5-9 students work with a skilled special class teacher and a teacher aide. The centre was the result of a meeting between local educational institutions/bodies and personnel who sought to combat concerns over growing student disengagement from the education system.

### Change Process

The centre was launched in 2003 and the practices described have been implemented from the beginning. The centre's entire ethos is based around creating change in student behaviour. This is apparent in the centre's mission statement: "Together with whanau and community, schools will provide an educational pathway that embraces a new beginning for students - 'Ko matou, Ko matou! Ko koutou, Ko koutou! Me haere tahi tatou! - You are you ! We are we! Together we go forward."

Three core goals have been agreed for ensuring that this mission statement is achieved. These include:

- Meeting the perceived personal, educational, and social needs of the individual students by:
  - Identifying at-risk students;
  - Researching and establishing an education programme that meets student needs; and
  - Continuing modification and evaluation of the programme to ensure efficiency.
- To support and prepare students for reintegration while they are at the centre through:
  - Providing intensive support that can meet students' needs; and
  - Creating a transition process with the student's original school.
- Ensuring that students are adequately transitioned back into mainstream education and ongoing support is made available to them.

Overall the programme is seen as one that will continue to evolve over time based on evidence of best practice. This evidence is regularly compiled in milestone reports, which acknowledge both areas of success and areas for improvement or development.

### Restorative Practices

#### a) School support systems

As a result of Rima Centre being a joint initiative, it has a unique management structure. A management committee consisting of the four school principals, representatives from the board of trustees (from the centre's location school), Ministry of Education, Group Special Education (GSE), and the centre's director, oversee management. The director oversees all daily activities.

The centre depends on one of the four partner schools making student referrals. Once a referral is made, the centre's system is designed to ensure that a referred student is embraced by the centre's support network. This network has six key stages that ensure support. They include:

- Identification of at-risk students and their referral – usually instigated by in-school support staff such as counsellors, RTLB, etc and finalised by the principal;
- Acceptance into the centre and a letter announcing this is sent to parents and the school the student is enrolled at;
- A Collaborative Action Plan (CAP) meeting is held involving parents, director, counsellors, GSE, principal and any others involved meet to discuss expectations, roles, timeframe, and to answer questions;
- Support staff develop a report about the student from the CAP and distribute this to all parties. This is used to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP) for the student. Both outline guidelines for behaviour and educational needs;
- The student and Rima Centre staff examine the IEP and IBP to ensure it is satisfactory to all parties and an orientation evening is used to introduce student and family to the centre; and
- Evaluating the success of the IEP & IBP. The development of an Individual Transition Plan to facilitate a student's transition back into the mainstream education system. GSE, RTLB and teacher aides support the student's transition.

### **b) Process and practice**

Rima Centre's activities are all based around a well defined routine. To ensure attendance, the director picks students up every morning, delivers them to the centre and drops them home each afternoon. Each school day follows a basic pattern and students receive continuous positive reinforcement, constant teacher attention and are immediately re-engaged in work when distracted. Staff plan weekly timetables, and regularly review the classroom environment checking on habits, interactions, learning patterns, behaviour, welfare, health and accomplishment in order to monitor exactly what is occurring in the centre.

When behaviour issues arise they are dealt with immediately through inquisitive communication, short classroom removals, the director's involvement and parental involvement. If the issues are serious, a meeting with the director, teacher and parents is held to discuss the student's future at the centre. All disciplinary measures are undertaken with the core objective of keeping students engaged and building on their strengths. Removal is therefore always a last option.

The final objective of the Rima Centre is to return students to their original school. Therefore the ten weeks spent at Rima Centre are geared towards creating an Individual Transition Plan that will enable a student to return safely to their school and to re-start their mainstream education. This involves a variety of specialised staff ensuring that support is available to students both while at the centre but also as they slowly transition back into their school. It also means the building of an individualised roster that slowly decreases the time a student spends at the centre and increases the time a student spends at their original school until the transition is complete. Each day spent back in mainstream education is closely monitored to ensure positive outcomes. Once a student has managed their full transition back to the mainstream education environment, their successful transformation is celebrated and they end their time at the centre.

### **Outcomes**

Rima Centre has had an outstanding impact on its participating students. It has also maintained a rigorous evaluation process that suggests it will continue to evolve in ways that ensure best practice is developed and that students therefore receive the very best care, attention and education. Positive outcomes have included:

- High rates of successful reintegration
- Improved student behaviour
- Improved achievement in maths
- Greater family involvement
- Improved achievement in literacy

# FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

This section summarises the key findings from all fifteen schools using data from both interviews and case studies. It describes the values, strategies, school structures and external sources of support that were important in effecting change. It describes teachers' views on the impact and the effectiveness of restorative practices.

The results show that, in New Zealand, restorative practices are as diverse as the schools which use them. In general, the incentive to change has come from a concern over student failure and truancy, bullying and behaviour problems in schools, and/or parental disengagement with their children's education. Although all those interviewed endorsed the new approach, the success of these initiatives has varied. Some schools have found it difficult to make much progress while others have seen a lot of change. At the same time, none of these schools feel that they have yet solved all their problems, several of them still report areas of dissatisfaction and not all the teachers in these schools have adopted the new strategies or supported them.

## Teachers' views on the impact of introducing restorative practices

When teachers representing the fifteen participating schools were asked their views on outcomes experienced from the use of restorative practices, twelve of the fifteen said they were in the range of 'good' to 'excellent'. Two other staff believed they had experienced a mixture of 'average' and 'good' outcomes with only one staff member believing that only 'average' outcomes had been achieved. The three staff members who believed outcomes were 'average' linked this to their programmes being very young (often only just over a year old) and a consequent lack of training and experience (particularly in holding conferences) and the time consuming nature of the process of arranging for conferences. Some of the schools had experienced setbacks due to a lack of funding, staff changes, insufficient training and a limited commitment among staff to the changes. These issues and other critical factors emerge from the discussion below.

However, all the teachers interviewed endorsed the value of restorative practices as an effective method for managing problems despite the difficulties that were sometimes encountered in developing the new strategies. All but three of these schools have found considerable value in adopting restorative strategies. They reported a reduction in the number of students being excluded from the school community through expulsion and suspension; improvements in student achievement and engagement; and improvements in the overall school climate.

## Values

Schools agreed on the need for a core set of values underpinning restorative practices. There was considerable consistency in views on what these were although there were differences in the way they were implemented.

### Respect

Respect was a central concept mentioned by all the schools in the study. This was the primary characteristic that needed to govern all relationships between teachers, students and parents. The notion that respect was something owed to teachers by students because of rank or role was rejected. Rather these schools believed that if everyone on the staff modelled respect in their own relations with students, then that had a powerful effect on the behaviour of the students. The meaning of respect often had to be teased out however. How does one deal respectfully with a

student who has behaved disrespectfully with you or someone else? What are the actions that indicate respect and disrespect? Language that does not belittle or diminish is key but so are more subtle cues such as tone of voice, body language and facial expressions. Effective listening to one another and the exploring of different points of view is important, as is being fair to everyone, being honest, being trustworthy and making good on any harm that you have done whether you are a teacher or a student.

## **Inclusion**

The importance of 'inclusion' in and 'belonging' to the school community are ideas closely related to the core value placed on respect. For the schools in this study, inclusion involves parents, grandparents, whanau (the extended family/support group) and the wider community as well as the teachers and students - all need to feel that they are part of the school community.

## **Achievement**

At the same time, these schools also affirm the key role of the school in enabling each student to achieve according to their abilities. The value on achievement implies a responsibility on the part of students to strive as well as a responsibility on teachers to provide appropriately for the learning needs of all the children they teach. As one school put it – *"We have a responsibility to create an environment that is conducive to learning"*.

## **Celebration of Diversity**

The importance of recognising and affirming the many different cultures of student origin was mentioned by several schools. Diversity within the school needs to be recognised and celebrated as a strength.

## **Strategies**

As with values, there was considerable consistency in the strategies that were used, although each school tailored practice to take account of their own community and students.

## **School discipline - behaviour management**

Schools identified a need to be clear about their expectations in relation to schoolwork and behaviour. Rules and sanctions need to be fair and firmly applied and all should know what is expected of them. Serious or continuing problems in relation to achievement and/or behaviour needs to be resolved by involving everyone affected; teachers, students, parents and others as appropriate.

Major features are an emphasis on a few simple clear rules, guidelines that apply to teachers as well as students, and responses to infractions that are routinely applied – 'firmly and fairly'. Most of these rules or guidelines emphasised positive goals such as treating one another respectfully, being honest and doing one's best rather than spelling out a long list of 'shall nots'.

Responses to breaches of school rules are graded depending on the seriousness and frequency of infractions and tend to involve more people, more senior staff and more face-to-face interaction as matters move up the scale. Characteristically, minor incidents resulting in harm are usually dealt with by apologies and repair of harm while disruption in the classroom is dealt with by short detentions or withdrawal from the class. Repeated or more serious matters were usually dealt with in meetings involving students, staff and parents, to identify and respond to the reasons for the problem.

## **Combining traditional and restorative practices**

Compromise in the use of restorative practices in conjunction with exclusionary processes can be problematic. Many schools have combined the use of restorative practices with other exclusionary measures such as the stand-down. Some have also used restorative conferences post suspension. But 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 to dealing with behaviour issues. Therefore some changes to stand down and suspension rules may need to be considered.

## **The use of restorative strategies for conflict resolution**

The use of restorative conferences in situations involving serious misbehaviour by students has had the effect of changing the emphasis from exclusion and punishment to inclusion and resolution of problems. The conferences aim to acknowledge any harm that was done, to find a way to make amends, and to develop a plan that enables families and teachers to provide the support that is necessary to achieve this, and to ensure that the student re-engages with schooling. Central to the success of the process is the empowerment of participants who are traditionally bypassed in decision-making about serious incidents and an emphasis on the resolution of the problem rather than the punishment of an offender. All parties are involved in the discussion about what has happened and in reaching agreement on what should be done to heal the hurts and restore the harmony of the school community. Core to facilitating a resolution is respect for all involved, providing support for change and avoiding shame and stigmatisation.

## **Affirmation**

The emphasis in these schools is usually on a system of recognition, praise and rewards for achievement appropriate to the student's abilities. Success was characteristically recognised for being a good member of the school community, participating and displaying good behaviour or a concern for others as well as for academic, cultural and sporting achievements. Recognition of success could be privately given to the individual or publicly within the class, at assemblies and/or to parents.

The emphasis in most of the schools was on regular rewards for achievement and an avoidance of the use of negative responses to problems. In behaviour modification terms, these schools were using a system of training by providing rewards for progress based on the reinforcement of small graduated steps toward desired goals. It is important to note that this behaviour management system is built on the integration of all key stakeholders from the school community. As a result, not only were teachers and students targeted for involvement in the reinforcement system, but so too were family, whanau/caregivers and community.

## **Support Networks**

The need for strong support networks for all members of the school community was also identified as being central to successful change. Schools need a variety of options to assist with specific needs, a variety of different processes for resolving problems, and diverse strategies that will reinforce the role of students in supporting one another. These were all seen as essential to preventing potential problems and to creating a school climate where constructive solutions to problems can be found.

All of the case study schools had found ways of supporting restorative practices at the senior management level and of allocating responsibility for restorative practices to key staff so that there was practical support for the implementation

of new strategies. Toru College created a separate management stream for support services that sat alongside other management structures.

## **Relationships**

Underpinning all of this, although rarely mentioned explicitly, is the importance of building the relationships between all those in the school community – students with students and teachers with teachers, as well as between teachers and students and parents.

## **Structures - who manages and decides?**

### **Role of the principal**

Almost everyone was in agreement about the key role of the principal in enabling a school to effectively implement these values and the restorative practices that would support them. In the most successful schools, the principal gave strong leadership. In addition, the senior management team had core roles in ensuring that appropriate practices were developed and sustained.

### **Board of trustees**

Support from the board was also valuable but seen as less central – possibly because this had not been a problematic issue for the schools in our study.

### **School organisation and staffing**

One of the key strategies for many schools has been to develop a structure that places emphasis on change at the heart of the school. Examples of achieving this include:

- A leadership structure that gives student support services an equal weight in the leadership hierarchy.
- Development of a programme around community liaison officers who manage truancy problems, liaise with parents, provide mentoring as needed and arrange restorative conferences.

### **Specialist support staff**

Availability of specialist support staff to respond to the needs of children most at-risk was a central feature for all of the schools in the study. These included social workers, resource teachers of learning and behaviour, counsellors, GSE staff, nurses and cultural advisors. The network is often large, typically involving people or groups who can assist with behaviour management, health care, educational difficulties and the provision of cultural and social support.

### **Ancillary services and special schooling**

Most of the schools relied heavily on programmes providing child and family support including parent-skills training, mentoring and intensive support programmes for both parents and children, specialist truancy services and health services that could accept referrals for a range of needs.

### **Staff training**

Those who offered restorative conferences had several staff who were trained and whose training was sustained and many also made sure that others, sometimes the whole staff, received some basic training in these strategies. The level of effectiveness was seen as being dependent upon the level of whole school 'buy in' to restorative and respectful approaches.

## **External Support**

### **Families and community**

Connecting families and schools is a key aspect of developing a restorative culture. A number of factors will influence the ease with which school/parent relationships can be developed and the form that they take including size and cohesion of the community, the different cultural groups within the community, the distances travelled and the modes of transport, and the ages of the students. Different strategies are needed to match each community and type of school.

### **Information and support**

The need for information on what is happening elsewhere, methods for developing new practices in one's own school and methods for networking with others attempting similar initiatives is currently only being partly met through Ministry activities. Support was better in some areas than others depending on whether special projects had been targeted and whether local Ministry officers provided support for the new developments. This is made more difficult by the fact that written information is often hard to access, the material is often not seen as 'teacher-friendly' and networks between schools adopting new practices are often weak. Better support and information is clearly needed and a number of options were suggested including:

- Training programmes – both for specialists and other staff in managing restorative conferences;
- Funding to train staff, develop programmes and maintain specialist roles and services ;
- Good links between schools and services in local areas to ensure that relevant and suitable support services are available and accessible, and to enable networking among schools using restorative practices; and
- Establishing a national clearinghouse for information on practice and support options.

### **Funding**

Without exception, the schools in the study were extremely concerned about being able to maintain and advance the progress made if special funding was discontinued. For example, the community liaison officers, central to one programme are not permanent staff and their status depends on the ability of the school to find additional funds to support them and their activities. Training resources come at a cost and there is no permanent arrangement for either of the potential providers used by the schools in the study to continue to offer training in New Zealand.

### **Ministry of Education support**

In the majority of cases, the role of the Ministry of Education proved critical in enabling them to successfully develop their programmes. A number of specific Ministry-supported initiatives have been or continue to be, invaluable in providing funding resources, restorative practices training, and in providing people able to give support to schools at a district level.

### **Professional support and leadership**

The support and leadership of other bodies and people outside the school is also important. For example, the affirmation of educationalists in other institutions such as universities, has played an important role for these schools.

On a more practical level is the need for resources. Two key supports have been the training provided by Margaret Thorsborne (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2002) and the Restorative Practices Development Team at the University of Waikato (2003).

Key publications are increasing in number. In addition to our research, "Restorative Practices for Schools" produced by the Waikato University Restorative Practices Development Team in 2003 is an excellent resource. Anti-bullying material produced by the New Zealand Police in the 1990s is also valuable and there are a number of overseas resources listed in a separate section of the references at the end of this report.

## **Evaluating effectiveness of restorative practices**

Assessing the impact of change in practice on outcomes for schools has been difficult. In part, this is because relatively little data exists allowing comparisons over time for schools and, in part, because some of the critical goals of the changes are not being measured either because they are not seen as relevant to school achievement or because they are difficult to measure. Although there is no direct causal link between the use of restorative justice practices and student achievement, related factors such as student attendance, can be improved through their use. It is important when implementing change to consider ways in which the impact can be evaluated. Below we set out a number of potential criteria or indicators of performance, discuss how they could be measured or monitored and discuss the roles of national bodies in assisting in this task.

### **Evaluation criteria**

#### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

We were able to compare results of secondary school examinations at years 10 and 11 for the five schools selected as case studies. All showed changes in achievement during the period following the introduction of restorative practices. However, these national qualifications have only recently been introduced and quality data is only now becoming available throughout the whole school system. The problems of not having standard, reliable and consistent measurement over time for all schools are underlined by this study. Without such data, the impact of new practice on achievement can only be partially assessed.

#### SPORTING AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The routine measurement of sporting and cultural achievements has not been a regular feature of school assessment in New Zealand and it is probably inappropriate to attempt to assess quality in these areas. Yet one might expect all schools to ensure that they are providing a range of activities and encouragement and recognition to students who participate. It may also be appropriate for each school to keep a record of the number of pupils participating each term and/or year in some activity under each of these headings.

#### STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Measures of school attendance are a crucial indicator. However, a national system has been unavailable for some years. The Ministry of Education is currently developing a national database that will provide reliable data to all schools in a standard form at regular intervals of no less than one year. They are also attempting to develop a reliable tracking system that records school transfers and enables follow up of un-enrolled students.

Most of the schools in the sample were running tracking systems on their own students so that rapid action could be taken to contact parents and locate children whenever there was an unexplained absence. When these schools compiled and reported their own data they were able to act effectively in following up students themselves. These schools reported considerable reduction in truancy since introducing restorative approaches.

#### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Measures of parental involvement have not hitherto been developed as indicators of school performance. This is an important gap for those schools attempting to assess achievement in this area and one deserving of further research.

The nearest approach to this topic was found in the surveys to parents used by one school in the study and perhaps this could be an effective strategy for schools wanting to assess performance as seen by these key members of the school community.

#### EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS

All the schools in the study reported lowered rates of suspensions and that they had used exclusions rarely or not at all over recent years. They also said that they rely principally on constructive responses and preventive strategies rather than using other exclusionary and punitive strategies such as time-out or detentions.

Unfortunately, there was only limited available hard data on either the number/type of infractions, or on the methods of responding. Consequently it is difficult to obtain long-term comparable data across all the schools against which the success or failure of the restorative practices could be assessed. All schools need to keep records in a standard form over time of suspensions, expulsions and transfer to alternative educational options outside the mainstream as well as on the use of restorative conferences, other restorative options, mentoring, parental consultations, referrals to support services and information on the occurrence of and responses to day to day disciplinary issues. An accessible data base holding all this information would be very valuable.

#### INSPECTIONS

In New Zealand, the ERO makes regular reports that are potentially a useful way of assessing change. However, we found difficulty in using these, as the purpose of the reports was not to grade and compare schools but rather to examine performance against certain standard benchmarks for that year. As a result, there was often no way to compare the school's performance on the same criteria over time. This underlines the importance of the regular assessment of all schools on key indicators that go beyond basic compliance with minimum standards in relation to health, safety, maintenance, and number of hours of educational provision.

#### SCHOOL REVIEWS

Some schools in this study had developed their own system of reviewing their performance against targets they have set for themselves. When this happened we found that these schools were actively reviewing practice on a regular basis and continuing to develop new systems or new methods of responding to particular problems or weaknesses based on the feedback gathered. Regular surveys of student, families and staff were one of the most effective methods being used for internal review and analysis.

### **Research and evaluation studies**

Evidence on the effectiveness of introducing restorative practices comes from a small number of quality research and evaluation studies that were commissioned in relation to some of the Ministry of Education initiatives (Hill and Hawk, 2000; Adair and Dixon, 2000). These studies have drawn favourable conclusions about the introduction of more positive whole school cultures compared to the use of exclusionary and punitive responses. However, as in this study, they have done so on the basis of a limited series of interviews and case studies with schools selected for their apparent success in making changes. Further research is undoubtedly needed to enable schools and communities to make confident decisions about the value of introducing restorative practices more widely.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to bring together information on the use of restorative practices in a number of schools around New Zealand that have been experimenting with these techniques. The schools who took part in this study were generally enthusiastic about the results they achieved. The use of restorative conferences that brought together staff, students and families proved to be effective in dealing with serious disciplinary problems constructively. But the schools found that they needed to introduce changes across the whole school if they were to improve all children's involvement and commitment to schooling.

The schools in this study developed their approach around values that emphasised respect, inclusion, achievement and the affirmation of cultural diversity. Disciplinary strategies became more constructive, more support was provided to students experiencing difficulties and achievements of all kinds were celebrated. The case studies showed that in practice, teachers, students and parents were building respectful relationships with one another rather than dealing with problems through confrontations. Students were developing a sense of belonging to a community that provided them with support and helped them to develop a sense of pride in their strengths and successes. Parents were enabled to build positive relationships with the school. Diversity of all kinds was recognised and accepted by students as well as teachers. An examination of NCEA results for the case study schools showed gains but even more important for those we spoke to, was the improved atmosphere within the schools.

The box on the following page summarises the features that were identified as important for good outcomes.

## **The keys to a successfully restorative approach**

1. The introduction of restorative practices for resolving conflict and serious disciplinary problems is effective in reducing exclusions but a fully restorative approach will have a wider impact in building a constructive and inclusive school environment.
2. A successful whole school approach will require the commitment of the whole school community. Students, management, staff, board members, family/whanau, caregivers, ancillary services/agencies, the Ministry of Education and local community must all be part of the process of building relationships.
3. The management of disciplinary problems focuses on constructive approaches in all areas of behaviour management.
  - Using positive reinforcement, matching tasks to children's needs and abilities and repairing harm rather than imposing punishments are central to all interactions.
  - Restorative meetings and conferences can be used when more serious problems occur.
4. A cornerstone in the building of an inclusive school is the promotion of restorative values and a sense of belonging through the use of 'restorative' language that respects rather than denigrates.
5. Building a restorative community is an evolutionary process which needs everyone to be involved in a consistent application of restorative principles and practice over time. Schools interviewed in this study suggested it took several years to embed changes and realise the full effect of them.
6. A successful restorative programme requires ongoing training of staff members and the development of school structures that promote the development of quality and comprehensive support systems.
7. Secure long-term funding for training and support systems for all members of the school community is necessary for a sustainable restorative approach in schools.

The necessary changes often involved the development of new school structures and changes in the role of staff as well as in day to day in the responses of staff to students. The principal inevitably played a key role in effective change. Staff training proved vital for effectiveness in changing practice throughout the school. Systems of support were important for everyone: teachers, students and parents.

Internal support for students can be provided in a variety of ways: through specialist staff such as school counsellors, by using students as mentors or buddies and by providing additional support to students with particular academic needs. Mentoring was sometimes made available to parents. Boards of trustees can play a part, especially in relation to suspensions and expulsions but also in encouraging parental involvement in the school. At times, referrals were made to community services. Support also came from local communities, Ministry officials and from the special programmes that had been set up under the Student Engagement Initiative (SEI) to trial and encourage new techniques for responding to truancy and difficult behaviour.

Nonetheless, schools generally reported a need for additional support both in developing and in maintaining their new programmes. Most schools have depended on special funding to enable teachers to be trained in restorative practices, to provide additional support services for students, to develop new ways of tracking absentees and to develop mentoring and community liaison. However, these schools remained uncertain about whether or not funds would continue to be available and feared that, without this support, they would not be able to sustain and continue the improvements.

More and better information was identified as a need for those developing and maintaining new practices. Several schools said they would like to develop a local network of schools with whom they could meet and exchange information. More written information on practice was asked for and a national clearing house was suggested as a way of providing this.

In conclusion, restorative practices are helping schools find new ways of engaging students and creating learning environments in which students feel they belong and can achieve. The schools in this study were very diverse in their ethnic makeup and in socio-economic compositions. Some were city schools and others were in provincial areas. Yet they were all able to adapt restorative practices to their own communities. Their success is a testament to the skills of their staff and to the support they have received from their communities as well as to the new values and practices they have adopted. We hope this report will encourage and assist more schools to experiment with restorative methods and enable more children to engage with learning.

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