Developing a restorative school culture: The blending of a personal and professional 'pilgrimage'

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Abstract

This paper outlines our school's journey towards developing a restorative culture, our place within this context, and the subsequent work required to ensure that practices, pathways and systems within were relationally sound, restorative and enhancing of relationships. To introduce our understanding of the restorative paradigm, we make visible our personal and professional journey. This article promotes the view that, in blending our personal with our professional selves, relationships are likely to achieve greater depth and connection. Our premise for this paper is the belief that restorative philosophy is a relational philosophy and that the key to relationships is engagement and connectedness. This philosophy draws on narrative assumptions for building restorative conversations. It also discusses the natural evolution of a training package that shares the excitement of introducing restorative ways of thinking and practicing with others.

Keywords: restorative practices, restorative justice, restorative conferencing, relational connectedness, narrative therapy

The term 'restorative' suggests that something has been damaged and needs restoring. In connection to justice or school culture, it often conjures thoughts of 'victims and offenders'. Howard Zehr (2008) says that to be 'restorative' one must 'live' in this way. He maintains that restorative philosophy is a 'lived' philosophy. For many people, the concepts of restorative philosophy are second nature and are lived with ease. For others, it is easier to be 'restorative' at home than in the workplace, or vice versa. For many, it is possible to consider themselves restorative until an event or issue tests this resolve. The challenge for most is to commit to a journey that requires us to hold or develop a restorative intent in both our personal and professional relationships. For some the journey begins within the personal sphere and moves to professional and for others it works from professional to personal relationships. The order of movement scarcely matters and will be different for every individual. However a 'lived' philosophy implies the journey is total and will involve our personal and professional selves.

Part One of this article begins with our own personal journey, or pilgrimage (see Notes), our 'lived' attempts at bringing together our own spiritual, emotional and relational ideas to blend with what we perceived to be 'restorative philosophy'. It discusses the significance of the variety of experiences that crossed our life path in our making changes, or 'buying-into' a different way of thinking and working, and to foster a deeper connection with you the reader, by providing a window into our personal and then our professional journey. This article shares how the experiences gained on our individual life 'walks' created a meeting place whereby, as two people, we became committed to serving the 'communities' we worked within. Our focus was concerned with growing climates of care where positive relationships would flourish.

On our journey we realised that our hopes for positive relationships, developed within a culture of care, would be in sync with restorative ways of thinking and acting. We experienced how restorative approaches to relationships had the potential to both transform and bring harmony to one's personal and professional self. Working as both school counsellors and trainers within the New Zealand school context, we began examining school-wide practices that were either affirming or diminishing of relationships and people. This article reflects on the influence that restorative ways of thinking and practicing had within our school environment.

Because relationships are at the heart of all that we do, the concept of restoration is essential to ensure that there are pathways, as well as commitment, to healing hurt or damage that inevitably occurs within them. It is our hope that this article will assist those people either considering, or in the midst of, a personal and professional paradigm shift.

The notion of restoration, whether it refers to renovating buildings and objects or, in this context, to restoring or rebuilding relationships, can involve two processes. The first is comprised of restoring the object, or in this case, the relationship to its former state and the second involves enhancing what was in order to make it better. This may mean bringing in new features to grow or develop what is already in existence. We see this second dimension as the transformative element of restoration so that restorative relationships, restorative school culture and restorative practices are not only concerned with restoring what was present before in each of these sites, but providing the opportunity to grow, enhance and increase the potential of each place. In the process of describing our approach to restorative practices, we shall also show how we incorporate principles of narrative therapy into the practice of school counselling and in the training work we facilitate about restorative philosophy and practices.

New Zealand has a long tradition of restorative justice and related practices. Māori have engaged in *hui*-style meetings to resolve conflict within communities for a very long time. The Family Group Conference emerged as part of the New Zealand legal process through the *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act, 1989*. This legislation mandated *hui*-like

processes into law in relation to youth justice, child welfare and, more recently, adult justice (Drewery, 2004). Underpinning the restorative model of justice, crime is viewed as an interpersonal conflict between the victim and the offender or as a violation of one person by another that needs to be addressed (Zehr, 1990). Proponents of restorative justice argue that the response to crime must begin where the problem begins, within relationships. They believe that the goal is to heal relationships that have been damaged (Drewery, 2004).

A restorative relationship will certainly endeavour to restore and heal damage and hurt that has occurred. However it will also have the opportunity to view the other person through a new and different lens because of the sharing that has occurred as part of the restoration process. A restorative school culture will be reflected in restorative and positive relationships throughout the school community. It is our belief that this will increase the chances of student engagement and, ultimately, student success. Restorative practices come from a school's desire to act restoratively and to determine that all practices will be respectful and honouring of relationships. In this way we regard restorative relationships, or the development of a restorative school culture and practices, as being connected to relationship development.

Part Two of this article describes our school's journey towards developing a restorative culture and the subsequent work to ensure that practices, pathways and systems within were indeed restorative. This article provides an overview of the inception of restorative philosophy and practices at the school in which we work in. Part Three outlines the evolution of a training package that began in our own school and has been delivered to many schools in this country over the past nine years. It describes the excitement of introducing restorative ways of thinking and practising to others.

The movement toward a restorative school culture requires a commitment by the school community to developing a whole-school approach to the way that relationships are regarded and nurtured. This article refers to this as the philosophy of the school or restorative philosophy within the school. The term 'restorative philosophy' referred to throughout this paper, is not so much concerned with a body of philosophical theory but with a way of thinking, or the intent for relationships and relational practices within a school setting - it is a relational philosophy. The ability to integrate and align both the personal and professional self within this relational philosophy and subsequent practices, presents as a challenge for some, while for others it requires a journey.

This paper offers some reflections on our work, personally and professionally, since joining the University of Waikato Restorative Development Team in the late 1990s. Interwoven throughout this paper, are personal reflections and experiences which have provided insight to the importance of relational practices.

Part One: A personal 'pilgrimage'

The journey that brought us, both as individuals and as a couple, to an understanding of the word 'restoration' involved many challenges. Ron spent ten years involved in pastoral ministry, working in communities where he had a special concern and care for the poor and the marginalised. His vocation for service then changed direction and he worked in a therapeutic community assisting with drug and alcohol dependency issues. He also worked for the Children, Youth and their Families Service (the New Zealand Government department for social welfare of children), first as a social worker and then as a Youth Justice Family Group Co-ordinator. It was

in this role that he first worked with and facilitated Restorative Justice Conferences. Ron's positions provided insights into the voices of the 'other' and deepened his commitment to advocating for those who were unable to speak for themselves.

Previously a social worker and a life-skills educator, Kath began the retraining process when she became a divorced woman and sole parent, in order to provide for her children. This journey involved accepting, indeed being grateful for, a Government 'benefit' and studying for seven years to complete a Masters degree. In time we, Ron and Kath, committed to one another and, with our four children, began a journey outside of our known lifetime faith community where we had both actively served all our lives.

While our personal community had become diminished, we knew that relationships would be essential to our restoration and central to our personal and professional 'wholeness'. We were in the position of knowing what it meant to be 'other'. We reflected on what it would mean to be restored; to be 'in' community with people prepared to be in forgiving, accepting, loving relationships. Many people have shared with us that certain events or personal journeys often inspire self-reflection and motivate 'buy-in' to either a personal paradigm actualisation or a shift.

From this place of reflection, the word 'restorative' gathered meaning and momentum. We promoted it to encompass all that we had learnt from the positions of being alienated, to work for those who, within dominant social discourses, were routinely regarded as 'other'. We knew that to re-build, heal and restore ourselves we needed to feel safe, be unconditionally cared for and respected in the relationships we forged. With this knowledge about ourselves, we sought counselling positions within a school setting and were fortunate to obtain positions in a local state secondary school within our city. Here we were working once more in a community where our care for others was appreciated without conditions. It was from within this setting that the word 'restorative' took on a more formal meaning and began our journey to work with schools who wished to initiate a relationally focused and restorative school culture.

Part Two: Restorative philosophy, restorative justice conferencing and practices

In the late 1990s we were excited to be invited to attend a workshop on restorative conferencing in schools at the University of Waikato (Drewery, 2004). A team from the University, which we later joined, were funded by the Ministry of Education, as part of the Suspension Reduction Initiative, to develop a pilot project for restorative conferencing in schools around the Waikato region (The Restorative Practices Development Team, 2004). Interest in restorative conferencing in schools paralleled an interest in restorative justice in the justice system in New Zealand. There were grave concerns for the increased numbers of suspensions from schools, a rise in the rate of youth offending, high numbers of young people truanting and a decrease in school achievement.

The intention was that the introduction of restorative conferencing would reduce the numbers of suspensions in New Zealand schools by resolving incidents or issues within the school community. Restorative conferencing involves gathering a community of people around a student, or students, who are experiencing trouble or problems. These people join in a conversational process that names the problem as distinct from the person, notices the effects of that problem on others and on themselves, finds sites when the problem is not present and

formulates a plan that will reduce the likelihood of the problem returning. Because the focus of conferencing is to restore damage done to relationships, and to restore connection through increased understanding, it often avoids the need to suspend a student.

Given that Ron had been both a Family Group and Restorative Justice Co-ordinator for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, we had some knowledge of the Family Group Conference intervention as well as the growing restorative justice movement. During his time of co-ordinating and facilitating youth justice conferences, Ron had experienced many situations where families had felt immobilised or held hostage by problem issues. They did not have the resources to change the problem story or to create a plan that would prevent the problem from reoccurring. In other words, the youth justice model moved straight from the problem to the plan for action. Ron's excitement and motivation to explore the University of Waikato's restorative conferencing model was connected to the focus on the 'alternative story', or the sites where the problem was not present. By separating the person from the problem and connecting the person to their strengths, a starting place and a plan for change often emerged (White, 2007).

The team from the University of Waikato had taken restorative justice principles, ideas from Māori *hui*-making (community meetings) and concepts of narrative therapy to design a restorative conversation process. This process shares features of other models. For example, it gives people the opportunity to discuss what has gone wrong or the problems concerned. It then invites reflection about how these issues affect others and, toward the end of the conversation process, a plan is devised to restore the harm or damage that has occurred.

However, in the narrative orientation to restorative philosophy, every 'practice' or 'tool' is purposefully used to grow and enhance relationships, and restorative conversations have their own distinct features (Drewery & Winslade, 2005). It helps people understand that problems are problems and that people can never be problems; it assists people to connect one another to alternative or different views of themselves and to how they would prefer to be (White, 2007).

Listening and speaking respectfully can assist to produce desirable outcomes. A narrative approach to restorative philosophy paves the way for relationship growth and not just repair or restoration work. It provides the opportunity for both parties to acknowledge their contribution to the problem story in a non-blaming way. By being genuinely curious about what caused the problem, spaces are often created whereby each person is able to experience the other differently.

Because the purpose and focus of a restorative conversation, in our mind, is always on engaging and growing quality relationships and not just having conversations to manage behaviour or apportion blame or consequences, the journey forward (or plan) is paved from this experience of difference; that is, the plan comes from a strength-based position.

The restorative conferencing intervention: A pilot school

The school we work in has a high percentage of Māori students. Restorative philosophy fits well for first nation or indigenous peoples who have a history of working to restore and rebuild damaged relationships within their communities. Indeed, a Māori approach to education has sought to build on or scaffold what is good about the young rather than to shame, humiliate or punish them (Drewery, 2007).

Mauria painga, waiho whengu

Highlight strengths, leave behind weaknesses.

(Māori Whakatauki or proverb)

The principal at our school supported a restorative approach to relationships and was committed to the intention of the restorative conferencing process, which was to keep students at school rather than to suspend or exclude them. While he would not have termed his practices as restorative, it became obvious to us that positive intentions for relationships at this school underpinned his motivation.

We recognised that it was not just the top achievers who had strong relationships with the principal; it was also the youngsters who were involved with trouble. He had an open door policy and students and their families both felt able to call in and talk with him. He spent his break times out with the student body and delighted them by joining in their games. He believed that a sense of humour helped him keep perspective and maintained that teachers needed to develop poor memories for past transgressions with regard to their students. He genuinely liked his student body and their families. And they knew it. He knew how to establish, and model, relational connectedness.

Our school undertook to be one of the pilot schools for the restorative conferencing intervention. The introduction to restorative concepts coincided with the need to examine school and community-wide practices because our community had lost a number of students to suicide. Our 'buy-in' as a school, and many schools seem to need a reason to 'buy-in', came from community/student vulnerability and the imperative of ensuring that school practices were not increasing the risk of suicide. Such practices as public humiliation and totalising language (Winslade & Monk, 2007) came under critical scrutiny.

We felt overwhelmed during the tragic time of losing four beloved students to suicide that blame was oppressive in our midst. We learned that blame was useless and it didn't provide meaning, peace or understanding. It didn't assuage our grief and losses at all, nor did it provide any form of ritual or opportunity to begin a dialogue towards moving forward, rebuilding and restoring our sense of community.

During this period of reflection many staff became immersed in and focused on restoring safety to our community. The school began mooting restorative philosophy, and there was a greater focus on the impact of language on relationships. With the support of the Waikato University, we introduced restorative conferencing as a major intervention that took place after serious incidents had occurred or when we could see that other interventions were not working and a young person was nearing the end of the chances they were likely to be given. In every intervention restorative conferencing did assist those involved (Adair & Dixon, 2000).

One experience of a restorative conference

A group of young women were involved in a fight at the bus stop at the entrance to the school. A group of young students from another school were also involved. It was found that the four students from our school, all at Year 11 (15 years of age), were responsible for instigating the fight, although the tension had been building between the two groups for some while. The principal thought it would be a great opportunity to bring the families of the four students in for a conference because all four had a long connection with trouble. He believed this was a last intervention and that all four would be suspended if the incident was not taken seriously. He proposed that a restorative conference be held on the school *marae* and that we organise and facilitate it (a marae is a Māori sacred meeting place, usually with a lovingly carved meeting house on it and many school communities in New Zealand have developed *marae* in the school grounds).

We visited all four families and discussed with them the situation, the protocol for the conference and their willingness to participate in this intervention. We also spoke to the young people involved to ensure that they were remorseful for what had happened. While they were sorry that it had ended in such a violent way, they were insistent that the other group were partly responsible. We visited the other school and their principal relayed that they would not attend or participate in the conference. However, it was established that there were some damages and doctors' bills that our group of students needed to take responsibility for. We also met with other key stakeholders who would be at the conference: the four year level deans (teachers who are responsible for a group of students within that year level) of the girls concerned, a netball coach, and a tutor teacher who wished to attend.

The conference took a full day. The narrative approach to restorative conversations and conferencing involves five Phases. I refer to this throughout the article as the five-phase conversation. Each phase was plotted on a sheet containing two circles and lines. We used the inside of the first circle for Phase One, which entailed full mapping of the problems/ issues/ tensions. In Phase Two we used the outer circle to ascertain and examine the effects of these issues and behaviours on all present. In Phases Three & Four, the second circle was filled as the conference discussed times and places where the problems were not present and the qualities of difference that the group noticed about the young person in those times. At this point, each family took their young person to a space of their own and worked on this 'alternative' and preferred story. They also worked on the beginnings of a plan (Phase Five) that would connect their child back to their resourceful and preferred selves. The group then came back together and provided an audience to the alternative story of difference for each student. Each family offered support and encouragement as the strengths and intentions of each child were presented as part of the plan and pathway forward. We recorded each family's plan. These ideas inspired other thoughts as well and other offers of help for the girls. This conference took place at the beginning of Term Two and, while the students were to sit their first major exam in Term Four, there was little hope for any passes. Their school academic records were discussed and plans were put in place for extra assistance and tutoring.

Three out of the four girls not only passed the School Certificate examination (first state-recognised exam) that year but they completed school to the end of year thirteen. The fourth girl completed the year and, although she did not pass, she went on to a Polytechnic and achieved in her chosen field. This group, now in their late twenties, still discuss with us this

important turning point and the various effects the conference had on each of them. It was the same for every conference that was undertaken. The results were always positive.

It would follow then that you could assume we are advocates of restorative conferencing. However, this is only partly accurate. We believe that conferencing seemed like a 'token' gesture; an intervention that came way too late when things had gone way too far. It stood as one restorative intervention or restorative practice but could not effect a transformation of the school into a restorative context or culture. While restorative conferencing has been used much like an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff, it became clear to us that conferencing was only one of many tools that could assist and be initiated as a response to a serious incident within the school. We began to develop a greater interest in designing a wider relationally-focused and restorative school culture.

Relational and restorative practices

Because many could see that the restorative conference process was working in the pilot schools, there were general feelings of approval reported from staff and community. We soon realised this was because staff believed that 'the problems/incidents' were being sorted and they did not need to involve themselves. When some teachers or other members of staff were asked to attend a restorative conference that called on two hours of their time, discord began to emerge. In conversations about the effectiveness of restorative conferences, we heard that they were great for 'fixing' things between 'victims' and 'offenders' or, if there was no apparent victim, they were useful as a warning or a 'wake-up call' for children with extreme behaviours, but the universal comment was that they were 'far too time consuming'. Again the view was outward looking at 'them' (victims/offenders/naughty children). There was never any mention about what I/we/the system/education/the teaching staff could be doing differently.

However, we were hearing from our own staff (and continue to hear repeatedly in our training work) that the most serious issue for schools was not connected to one-off behaviour incidents, or conflict resolution, but involved the non-engagement of students with either the teaching staff and/or the curriculum. The issue was not concerned so often with the need to restore relationships, because in many cases relationships had never been forged in the first place. We often heard how students were disruptive and not interested in learning, and some teachers maintained that students 'didn't seem to care' about education. Interestingly too, the Ministry of Education shifted its focus from the SRI, Suspension Reduction Initiative to SEI, Student Engagement Initiative. We recognised that, while some students were engaged with school for social reasons and some were emotionally connected to their teachers, others were curriculum and achievement oriented, surprisingly few were literate in all three areas.

We realised that teachers who had always engaged students easily and worked in a restorative way did not seem to be having problems with students, relationships, discipline or facilitating curriculum learning. Students tell us repeatedly that the teachers they are most engaged with know how to blend their personal with their professional selves in the classroom. They report that it has nothing to do with age or whether the teacher is strict or relaxed. They maintain it is concerned with how they 'engage' with their students, work alongside them, and whether their approaches are genuine. We heard that the 'problems' being handed on to management level often involved teaching staff who were struggling with relationships and subject engagement issues. We noticed that these engagement issues often brought out

negativity, disrespect and blame from teachers towards students, and from students towards teachers.

The practice of handing-over or referring disciplinary issues is problematic as a relational practice and requires further explanation. When a negative behaviour occurs in a classroom, often the incident will be reported and passed on for someone 'higher' (with more status) in the teaching fraternity to 'deal with'. This may mean involving the dean and/or the head of department or faculty, and then it may go further to the assistant or deputy principal or to the principal for a stand-down or suspension. In the process of handing on the problem issue, the two people who originally experienced the problem do not always get the chance to sort it out, to be part of the solution, or to restore the relationship between them.

Often the person who 'works with' the issue and the student (Wachtel, 1999) does not include the original person in the restoration process. More than likely, the student will re-enter the site where the problem occurred, having been worked with by someone else, and the relationship between student and teacher remains unrestored. This is liable to cause ongoing issues and/or non-engagement with that teacher/student and the subject concerned.

Rather than this type of pass-on practice being regarded as a 'signal' that teachers may need professional development to be able to work with issues themselves, it has become an acceptable part of school practice; one that does not appear to inspire respect from students who believe the need to 'refer on' to a higher authority suggests a weakness in the teacher's control. This insight provided one vital component to the restorative pathway that was to be employed in the school we worked in, and later was to become a significant point of difference in the training package we deliver to others. It highlighted the need to examine closely the long-held, taken-for-granted practices in schools that have not been conducive to building connected or positive relationships.

From early on, our writing and training, initially in our own school, focused on setting up skills and pathways that made it possible and preferable for problems to be restored at the site where they occurred and on a daily basis. In this way, the two people involved have the opportunity to develop a relationship with one another and, through the restorative narrative five phase conversation (Drewery, 2004), have the opportunity to view each other through a preferred alternative lens.

It appears that senior managers or leaders in schools have taken over relationship breakdowns and discipline of students, and in many cases, school leaders are growing positive relationships with a great body of students because of their positive interventions, whereas many classroom teachers are not engaging students or restoring their relationships with them.

We have noticed that bullying often emerges as a signal that a person, adult or student, is not coping. We wonder whether we respond at times to these signal behaviours best in our student population but do not recognise them at work with adults. By 'signal behaviour', we are referring to behaviours that we identify as flagging or signalling to us that there is something underlying the behaviour that is not necessarily positive. If we were to consider some of the behaviours that some teachers employ, deemed as negative or non-engaging, as a language in themselves, what might they be telling or 'signalling' to us? A restorative community might reflect on what could be done to ensure that such signal behaviours are noticed and worked with. It is not about blame; it is, however, about assisting with problem issues: that is, signal behaviours; bullying, yelling, shaming, tantrums, handing-on.

Professional development money is generally dedicated toward curriculum delivery. Few schools acknowledge the issue of teachers who are struggling or unable to address their relationship issues with students. Colin Gibbs, Principal Lecturer in charge of teacher education at Auckland University of Technology believes that teaching is about radiating relational connectedness. Gibbs (2008) states that heartfelt teachers know what it means to care for students, to love them, and to share compassion. Gibbs believes that care, love and compassion radiate through the best teacher's presence.

Collaboration: A restorative practice

Many students tell us that they feel education is 'done' to them; they are required to be at school until the age of sixteen years, and believe they have little say in how or by whom their subject choices are presented to them. Regardless of what type of learner a student may be, we hear that many teachers do not offer differentiated, strength-based or enquiry-based learning opportunities. Students often report that they have little or no input into their learning and they tell us they find the work 'irrelevant and boring'. Those teachers who employ a restorative approach to relationships espouse the view that sharing ideas and igniting interest about possibilities for curriculum content and delivery-style is honouring of relationships and gains 'buy-in'. They say that listening to the student's voice is an essential part of planning to ensure that content is relevant and accessible. Collaborative relationships are at the heart of restorative practices.

However, many of the problems that occur in schools indicate that teaching staff have not begun the journey toward working in collaboration 'with' their students. Many schools are concerned with non-achievement, or behaviour management, whereas the focus needs primarily to be on developing quality relationships and then on relationship management and maintenance. Most students work hardest, behave best, and are at their most eager to learn, when they are in positive relational space with their teacher.

Developing a restorative school culture begins with self-reflection on individual practices and on willingness to practice and engage in relationships 'restoratively'. It rests on a community journey, initially individually and then collectively, towards looking at relationships and being open to working on skills in order to more readily engage and create connections with one another. Adults in schools need to model to the young how to communicate, heal and mend all possible issues that interrupt relationships. As schools seek to blend the emotional, social and academic literacy of their students, their systems must signal that, as problems occur within relationships, the natural order is the expectation that they will be healed or restored. This paradigm shift requires a communal understanding about what the word 'restorative' means in their particular culture.

At the same time that we realised that restorative conferencing was too great an intervention to be resourced in many schools, we realised that many leaders and practitioners were attending 'restorative conferences or meetings' with a punitive and blaming attitude. Many had decided on what the outcome of the conference would be before it began, and others wanted the opportunity to 'read the riot act', to blame the person they believed to be the 'problem'. This approach viewed the offender as 'the problem', or the cause of the problem, and the 'victim' as a person who had been harmed in some way. Getting the 'offender' to repair/restore the harm done to the person they had offended against was the main intent of the process for many. If the school itself was the 'victim' of the behaviour, many viewed

conferencing as an opportunity to talk about the issues and to ascertain a plan so that the student would cease to 're-offend'. Clearly the potential of the restorative approach was not understood and, like many new initiatives, bits and pieces were being used in a disembodied way to justify bringing about a desired outcome. The pathway, conversations and process were not necessarily relationally or restoratively focused, and the key belief that the 'problem is the problem; the person is never the problem' was not always being upheld.

The inception of restorative philosophy within our school community

Following changes in leadership positions and a time of upheaval in our school, restorative approaches had become diminished and student engagement and achievement had declined. Punitive sanctions such as detentions, stand-downs and suspensions were not assisting in managing behaviour. Students were not attending detentions, and therefore the punishment was increased to a Saturday detention, which was mainly attended by teachers. Non-attendance resulted in the student being stood down for a period of time. Many enjoyed this time-out opportunity.

Relationships between teachers and students were disheartening and much in-class time was spent correcting escalating disruptive behaviour. Some teachers who had already sampled restorative conferencing, without fully understanding the concept of restoring connection through an increased understanding of all parties (Drewery 2004), were resistant to any further training about restorative possibilities.

However, a new principal was appointed; one who was already trained in and committed to restorative philosophy and relationally-focused practices. He introduced the whole staff to readings and professional development about restorative approaches, and he initiated that we begin the training process. Detentions were abandoned and it was decided that pathways would ensure that teachers could meet with any student on a daily basis to mend issues/problems and tensions that had arisen in the relationships. Our Principal and his leadership team, alongside many other committed staff members, began building on an existing culture of care to ensure that restored and positive relationships opened the necessary spaces for engagement,

Teachers had needed the opportunity to attend training to reflect on restorative approaches and philosophy; to consider restorative practices (in and out of the classroom); to focus equally on quality relationships, teaching and learning. Teachers reflected on their ability to 'connect' with their students, and considered how their curriculum approach might create better connection. Training provided a process for a restorative conversation that enabled mutual sharing and healing of conflict, as well as offering the possibility of enhancing the way the two people view each other; re-humanising each other through greater understanding.

We provided training that was undertaken over three days and completed in several rounds. Senior leaders or managers, deans, pastoral care staff, and heads of faculty, were in the first round. This enabled this group to begin working on practices and pathways within the school, and to begin having different kinds of conversations with young people. Subsequent training opportunities included teaching staff, office administration staff, grounds-people, cleaners, and support staff.

Training was then extended to Year Twelve and Thirteen senior students who, alongside teaching staff, began talking with junior students at home-room times about restorative ideas and the shift from punishment to restoring relationships. These senior students also made themselves available to assist their peers to have restorative conversations with their teachers, if they were finding it difficult to articulate their thoughts. Families were invited in after their young person had attended a certain number of restorative conversations. In this way, the community began to experience restorative relationships and restorative conversations as teachers began talking to them about their children in a different way. They told us that they experienced a sense of being involved in partnership relationships with the school. The same five-phase format for having restorative conversations covers every kind of meeting, and in this way has become the way we dialogue as a community. This ensures a common understanding of process and provides a plan for moving forward.

Stand downs became a restorative time-out where community was gathered to help work forward more positive suggestions for students. Practices and policies were viewed through a different lens and there was constant debate about, 'Is this [what we are doing] restorative?'

Extending restorative approaches

Restorative philosophy is not a body of theory concerned with behaviour management or only intended for schools that acknowledge behaviour or achievement issues. Restorative philosophy is concerned with relationship formation; it involves blending the academic, social and emotional intelligence of our young so that we participate in growing fully educated people. The New Zealand Curriculum requires that educators are concerned with developing 'whole' people, not just people with curriculum knowledge. This involves schools accepting that they may be influential and significant sites where values and relationship principles (how to mend harm; be respectful; grow empathy; show compassion; act out of honesty; resolve conflict) are 'storied', 're-storied' and modelled. There is a need to ensure that adults, structures and pathways in schools make this learning and teaching both apparent and possible. We believe that positive relationships are at the heart of a successful school.

Relational and restorative philosophy is applicable and desirable for every sector of education so that respectful and healthy relationships can be modelled to our young. Schools are often agents for social change and, by growing social and emotional intelligence and sound relationship skills in young people, new possibilities and preferred ways of being treated (in relationship) may emerge.

By inviting families into school and working 'with' them and their children in a restorative way, and by taking time to listen to their stories of resourcefulness, we may provide them with a new and positive experience of education. Many who had had negative experiences in their own schooling, or who had felt blamed for their children's behaviour, have reported to us that the restorative conversation process has restored their faith in education. They tell us that the process connected them to their own resourcefulness so that they want to work 'with' us to help their child. This has the potential to connect members of our extended communities to their first restorative experience.

Restorative approaches at work

Some time ago a teacher, who had previously taught at a private school, approached us to tell us that one of our highly esteemed Year Twelve students had been disrespectful to her on more than one occasion after she had asked her questions in class. She was struggling to restore the relationship with the student and maintained that the young woman concerned was 'disrespectful and abusive'. The teacher asked that we mediate a restorative conversation between her and the student. When we approached the student, initially she employed disrespect to convey that the teacher wasn't listening to her and that she was feeling picked on in class every time she went.

The first and second phase of the mediated conversation gave both parties the chance to discuss the problem and its effects. The teacher described how disrespect had been expressed through language and attitude in class, where she had asked some simple questions to check out knowledge and understanding of directions given. The teacher said that as a result she dreaded going to that class and she was worried that others would join with disrespect. The student's response was curt as she insisted that the teacher kept picking on her and asking her questions, even when she didn't have her hand up. She said that she felt that the teacher was 'looking to find fault' with her.

Hearing this, the teacher appeared visibly upset and astonished. She quietly stated that 'picking on' this student was the last thing on her mind. She moved straight into phase three of the restorative conversation by explaining to the student how she had been told, when she had been given the class, that this student was a natural leader and could be relied on to support her and to 'do the right thing'. She said that all reports of this student had been positive and that she had been attempting to 'win her over' and 'build her up', because she knew of her positive reputation and her capabilities. She said that she thought they had been building quite a positive relationship at the beginning.

The student then agreed that when the teacher had first arrived 'things were sweet' and she thought she was 'cool' because she didn't pick on anyone and the class thought she really 'knew her stuff'. She looked at the teacher and told her that it was not okay 'to single her or anyone out' if they didn't put their hands up to answer questions. She respectfully shared with the teacher how in her culture it was shaming to be focussed on in this way. The teacher and the student no longer needed a mediator and continued to have a conversation about what would be helpful and what practices would work in this school. Since that time, this teacher and student have forged a close working relationship.

The following story provides an example of how restorative conversations can heal past damage and restore the opportunity for a student to access education. A young man, who we shall refer to as Ben, came to our school after being excluded from another school for vandalism. At the meeting we attended we heard how Ben had actually been excluded from a significant number of schools for breaking windows, and we were informed that Ben would need guidance and counselling support if this school was to be a successful placement for him. We soon heard how breaking windows had assumed a loud voice when no-one was listening to Ben, and how it was successful in getting him out of schools that he didn't want to be in.

We learnt that Ben had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in his first year at school. We heard that the effect of this was that, whatever class Ben went into, he got the feeling he wasn't wanted and, moreover, that anything negative that happened was his fault. When he tried at times to explain himself or stand up for himself, he felt no-one was interested. He perceived that teachers supported each other and that principals believed their

staff over him. So he knew he had to get a louder voice than them so that he could get out of these environments, and he soon discovered that breaking windows provided a very loud voice indeed.

After Ben had been in our school for two years, we had a conversation with him about the absence of 'breaking windows'. He smiled and told us that he no longer needed to use this 'protesting voice' because he was in a class where he was listened to. He told us that things still went wrong at times but the difference in this school was that, when he went to have a 'restorative' (conversation) with his teacher, she listened to him, and then he listened to her, and then they worked together to fix what had happened. He said there was no need to be 'breaking windows' because he was so much less stressed because his voice was always listened to at this school.

Since the inception of restorative philosophy and practices in our school, and as our training work evolved, a member of the senior management team has been appointed to care-take restorative philosophy in the school; to uphold and remind us of our core philosophy during times of struggle; and to ensure that systems continue to support all. This manager collates data, issues articles on restorative practices and initiates professional development on restorative philosophy and practices to keep staff updated and refreshed. A recent review by the government's Ministry of Education Review Office, known in New Zealand as ERO, who review schools' pastoral and curriculum development every three years, reported that restorative philosophy and practices are 'embedded' in our culture. That does not mean that we all don't trip up or that relationships always run smoothly at our school. Conflict abounds and challenging behaviours (of children and staff) still emerge on a regular basis but, just like at home, we have a common way and core belief that we can and will mend things that go wrong.

Over the past nine years we have developed and delivered a training package. It encompasses the insights gained from working both at the chalk-face in a challenging and dynamic state secondary school as well as from working closely with the University of Waikato Restorative Development Team.

Part Three: The evolution of a training package

Part Three of this paper outlines the foci of our training package, which evolved from the insights gained in the journey outlined thus far. It discusses significant points of difference from many other training approaches, and examines some of the barriers and resistance that schools commonly encounter in their movement toward a more restorative approach.

Because we had been passionate in guiding our school towards practices that would be in harmony with the care-giving it excels at, we were encouraged by our principal and supervisor to write a training package. Another school heard about the work we were involved in and we were invited to work within their school.

The motivation we needed to stand before others came from the losses we had experienced as a school. Our encounters with these significant youngsters, and their families, not only sparked our commitment to helping create safe, caring and productive school environments where outcomes were positive, they also inspired us and made it necessary.

Initially we worked with any group that contacted us and we agreed to work with whole staff groups. We soon came to realise that certain factors were important to training. One was to encourage interaction within the group, to make it safe and comfortable for members to speak up, to ask questions, and to express uncertainties, doubts or concerns. For this reason we try to ensure that numbers make this level of communication feasible. Other things we realised after our initial training work was that culture shift requires organisational shift, and senior leaders or managers need to be involved because they have the power to reflect on, model and change school-wide practice if necessary.

We learned not to compromise training time because feedback informed us that people required the three days in the initial training to process the information and new ideas presented. We also heard that those staff most receptive to restorative approaches had been part of the reading, learning and discussion groups that had been offered, rather than staff who had training imposed on them by management.

We have now been involved in training for nine years and our training package has been re-written and the foci re-defined many times. As we facilitate training, we try to ensure that it 'fits' the culture and needs of the particular school: that is, the way they do things in that particular environment (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2007), and the way they would like restorative philosophy to be visible in their school.

Our training package is, in its fullest sense, a five-day package to support culture shift within a school environment over a five-year period. Initially, however, we facilitate one-hour and one-day workshops to introduce our understanding of restorative philosophy and to provide a window into what a three-day training package will provide in greater depth.

Day one

Day one of a three-day training focuses on relational and restorative philosophy and on the importance of establishing relational connectedness within the school community. Day one is concerned with adult relationships with one another and adult practices within the school setting. It provides opportunities for teachers and school staff to reconnect with their own aspirations of 'best practice'. It asks people to consider how they can blend their personal and professional selves in their relationships at school. It gives opportunities for self-reflection, as well as reflection on 'taken-for-granted', long-held, school-wide relational practices that are most likely to bring about positive mutual relational regard. It promotes the belief that issues or problems in relationships need to be addressed at the site where the problem is occurring. There is time given to reflect on the positive and necessary components of relational and restorative discipline.

Day two

On day two we examine the importance of language and how it constructs our world and the meanings we make and the positions we take up. We propose that the way we are positioned (Drewery & Winslade, 1997), as individuals and as a collective, comes from all that we have known; the discourses, experiences and wisdoms that we have accumulated thus far.

Day two encourages reflection about how we speak, it examines the way that discourses, positioning, language, assumptions and judgments affect the way we listen, what we hear, and the subsequent conversations we have. It promotes a greater consciousness about what we say, how we say what we say, the way that what we say can be interpreted, and our intentions for the relationships before us.

On day two of our training package, we introduce restorative ways of practicing and the five-phase restorative conversation process. This conversation process will give people the opportunity to discuss what has gone wrong, or the problems concerned, by using an externalising conversation tool. It then invites reflection about how these issues affect others and, toward the end of the conversation process, a plan is devised to restore the harm or damage that has occurred. However, in the narrative orientation to restorative philosophy, every 'practice' or 'tool' is purposefully used to grow and enhance relationships. The conversation process assists people to connect one another to alternative or different views of themselves and how they would prefer to be (White, 2007). It provides the opportunity for both parties to acknowledge their contribution to the problem story in a non-blaming way. By being genuinely curious about what caused the problem, spaces are often created whereby each person is able to experience the other differently.

Day three

In many schools we hear from teaching staff that the discursive context of schooling is making it more difficult to teach and manage behaviour. It appears that many social and cultural representations, combined with their varying ideas, practices and experiences, all present in one classroom can make for a challenging and potentially volatile teaching environment (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997).

Day three focuses on how to use restorative processes to incorporate the teaching of values, or virtues, pertinent to the unique culture of that school, into everyday classroom programs. It provides possible classroom and school-wide systems and pathways in both primary and secondary settings. Emphasis is given to the notion of 'story-ing' what is not known or has never been experienced prior to 're-story-ing' what has been harmed. While all people are richly storied, in various ways, there are many aspects to our lives that may not have been 'storied' and this storying may need to happen prior to an expectation that we understand what is going wrong within the classroom setting.

Day three pays attention to 'signal' behaviour, expressed both verbally and non-verbally, and examines how it is often not recognised by adults as a flag that something else is going on for that person or how it can become a barrier to relationship-building when it invites a parallel response. We spend time reflecting on behaviour as a language and responses that could grow meaning and understanding, rather than close down communication.

Restorative 'I'

A huge personal challenge when training is to overcome the idea that restorative philosophy is only concerned with providing tools/pathways to address discipline issues or to fix problem situations, including 'offenders' and 'victims'. Restorative conferencing, or restorative practices and tools/pathways/strategies, enable people to look outwards. Restorative Philosophy requires us to look inward; it is about me/we and us.

In schools, depending on who you talk to, the reason for negative school culture shifts. Often teachers tell us that student behaviour is 'the problem', whereas senior leadership teams often confide that it is the attitudes of the adults in the school that are problematic. A recurring theme often espoused is, 'If management doesn't get it right, or isn't restorative, why should I/we be?' These outlooks still reflect an outward-pointing finger, a blame mentality of 'who' or 'what' **out there** is the problem, that is, the problem does not concern me. We propose that restorative philosophy involves an inward soul-searching about: 'What can I be doing for this school/the culture/the relationships I am engaged in or those I am struggling with?' 'How can I uphold my restorative values, principles and relationships, especially when it seems as if I am on my own?' 'How can I be my preferred self in the face of criticism and resistance from colleagues?' We are concerned with the Restorative 'I'.

Restorative philosophy is to be taken home and lived (Zehr, 2008). It becomes the way 'I' think, speak and act. I am interested in being a restorative person because it is the right thing to do — the right thing for me to do. I want to make a difference in my own relationships, in the extended community, and for my and your children and grandchildren.

The focus of many schools has been to implement restorative strategies/conversation techniques/school systems/conferences in order to repair the damage done to people who have been 'victimised' by an offence against them, and to assist staff to become confident in facilitating intervention tools. However, our training package proposes that a community-wide commitment to engage in healthy, respectful and pro-social relationships may negate the need for such large-scale interventions. We believe that, if people are committed to the core of their beings to being restorative practitioners, their practices, relationships and demeanor will reflect this philosophy. Decisions about staff and students, curriculum, discipline, the environment, will come from this position and will be reflected by a respectful, engaged and positive school culture. The focus will move from locating all problem situations in the character of individuals to the development of quality relationships (Drewery & Winslade, 2005).

Working with resistance and objections

At many of our trainings, we hear staff say they don't feel that they should have to take up the work that has been neglected by students' families. We discuss with them the belief that 'It takes a village to raise a child' and ask that they consider how we all benefit from the assistance of the wider community especially in the face of any kind of crisis.

Many schools have reported to us that it is the minority of staff that pull against or resist culture shift. Indeed this comes as no surprise, but it is unfortunate that the minority often have, or are given, the loudest voice. Just as educators advise against allowing minority negative behaviours to rule classrooms, there needs to be a strategy for giving greater attention to the majority. This does not mean that the minority should be ignored; resistance needs to be

worked 'with' in a restorative way, thus attending to the concerns of this group. Some adults express the belief that this philosophy is 'warm and fuzzy' and far 'too lenient' but, on the other hand, when asked how many find it easy to mend conflict in their relationships, they acknowledge it is challenging and many say that they avoid it.

Often a school will initiate a culture shift by training and attending to the understandings of adults. We have heard people express the view that students just need to 'abide by the decisions made and follow the systems in the schools'. Young people tell us that they would rather go to detention, or be stood-down, than have to attend a restorative conversation with a teacher with whom they have fallen out. Many schools do not train, work with or even explain to their students what a restorative school culture means. They do not model the language used in restorative conversations that students will be expected to engage in. There is often an assumption that students will be able to have restorative conversations with adults, who often are more skilled and always are more powerful than them. Many times we hear from teachers that young people are monosyllabic, yet we think they will engage freely and articulately with a culture shift that asks them to share something of themselves with a person with whom they may not be in the best relational space. It is little wonder that there is resistance to restorative practices by students who do not understand or have positive experiences of the restorative approach.

We are engaged in growing positive relational practices and advancing social and emotional intelligence by giving young people skills that they will be able to use forever more. Therefore, we need to teach them too, to help them use appropriate vocabulary and to open safe spaces so that their efforts are honoured. Working with their resistance is an essential part of our quest to grow articulate adults who are able to engage and manage positive healthy relationships.

Finally, one concern commonly expressed is the issue of time. Initially many schools, in the process of creating a culture shift to becoming a restorative school, focus on doing what they already do in a restorative way. However, the issue of time is always present and is multifaceted. It is concerned with the lack of time available in the school day for working with issues in a restorative way; the time it would take to change the school's culture, as well as the time available for training, support and review of practice (Hopkins, 2004).

Once a school is committed to working in a restorative way and people believe this approach will make a difference to their community, they often realise that their disciplinary efforts have always taken time. Chasing up students who do not turn up for detentions (during the day, after school and, for some schools, weekend detentions) has always taken time, as have stand-down return meetings and other sanctions or interventions. Once restorative philosophy is embedded in a school culture, with systems and pathways in place, people realise that it is both time-effective and positive in its results.

Acknowledgements

Notes

Further information about our work can be located on our website: www.restorativepractices.co.nz

Our understanding of the term 'pilgrimage' comes from an old hymn:

> 'We are pilgrims on a journey,
> We are pilgrims on the road;
> We are here to help each other
> Walk the mile and bear the load'.

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