The Australian Context – Restorative Practices as a Platform for Cultural Change in Schools.

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Introduction

The implementation of Restorative Practices in Australian schools is moving at a frenetic pace, with practice developing in most states and territories. The quality of that practice and the approach by practitioners is variable, dependent on their background, experience, passion and interest. It is a time where we need to stay open, stay in communication and explore together what assists to build quality practice in an educational context. We have reached tipping point and we need to manage that so that it tilts in the right direction. Poor implementation will have a dramatic effect on how schools view the long term viability of working restoratively.

In Australian schools restorative practices is developing a platform for cultural change. To do this requires a broad understanding of the implications of working in a relational context, the layers of implementation and how this contributes to key educational outcomes. Effective implementation of restorative practices requires realignment in thinking and behaviour within the school community. Repairing harm and taking responsibility for behaviour requires that we understand the environment to which we are restoring to and the business that environment is engaged in. Schools are a place for learning: at a social and academic level (Lingard et al, 2003). Wrong doers need to return to their classroom and 'victims' need to feel safe in the presence of the person that they felt harmed and affected by. To do this effectively, we need to look at the preventative and proactive end of the spectrum by skilling students and educators to develop the capacity to manage their emotions, to resolve conflict, to work in inclusive and cooperative ways – the social and emotional skills. This paper will explore the elements of effective practice in the implementation of restorative practice in an Australian schools context.

Emerging Practice

Initially within Australia and internationally, restorative justice was translated into the educational context as an effective option for behaviour management – or another tool in the kit bag of behaviour management strategies. The most formal of these practices - conferencing was seen as an effective option for dealing with significant issues of harm in a school setting. Since then, a range of practices have emerged from the preventative to the proactive end of the spectrum, providing educators with a range of options for dealing with difficulties and disruptions in an educational context.

However, having a range of options at hand, still keeps restorative practices as a behaviour management tool, unless we start to understand that working restoratively is all about dealing with the impact of our behaviour on others. For schools that have typically used compliance based models, this requires a fundamental shift in how they view what has happened. Is it a breach of the school rules in which a sanction must necessarily follow, or is it a breach of right relationships? Restorative justice is a paradigm shift that requires a different inquiry (Zehr, 1990): instead of inquiring as to who is to blame, the rule they broke and establishing the 'right' consequences – the inquiry shifts to

understanding what happened, who has been hurt and what needs to happen to repair the harm. It is a relational inquiry that compels educators and practitioners alike to start to examine the existing nature of relationships. If we do not value relationships in the first place, restorative practices are likely to be used as just another big stick.

As practitioners working with schools it is important to understand the environment in which we are seeking to introduce restorative practices into. We need to think beyond our area of 'expertise' and help educators make sense of not only how this fits into the school environment, but how it links to the core business of educators – in an environment where educators may not necessarily be clear on this themselves.

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

The foundation of restorative practices is about understanding that when something happens, it has the potential to harm and damage relationships. Working restoratively is about valuing relationships within the environment that we live and work within. Schools that engage us do not necessarily affirm this view, perhaps feeling overwhelmed with a crowded curriculum and competing demands on their time. Relationships are seen by many as the soft component of educational imperatives. As practitioners in the field, we need to assist schools and educators to reconnect with what assists young people to learn. Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) state that '*Education theory clearly articulates the importance of healthy relationships between all members of the school community to discipline and pedagogy. Restorative justice has much to offer in this respect.*' (p.180). There is much research and evidence to support this shift.

A shift from discipline and behaviour management systems to relationship management is not a new idea. Kohn (1996) challenges educators to reconsider their approach to the academic and non-academic matters '*…as reflecting a philosophy of either doing things to students or working with them*' p23. Glasser (1969) referred to this as a shift from '*boss-management*' to '*lead-management*' within schools: the former about the '*boss*' or teacher telling students what to do in all facets of their learning and using coercion to bring about compliance. A system based on extrinsic rewards and regulation, where by 7th grade, students already see their teachers as adversaries. '*Lead-management*' on the other hand is about drawing on the intrinsic motivation to learn and to do the right thing. This is a concept supported in restorative justice literature by Braithwaite (1989) who writes that whilst external controls need to be there in the background, it is the development of an internal locus of control that will have the greatest impact on regulating a child's behaviour.
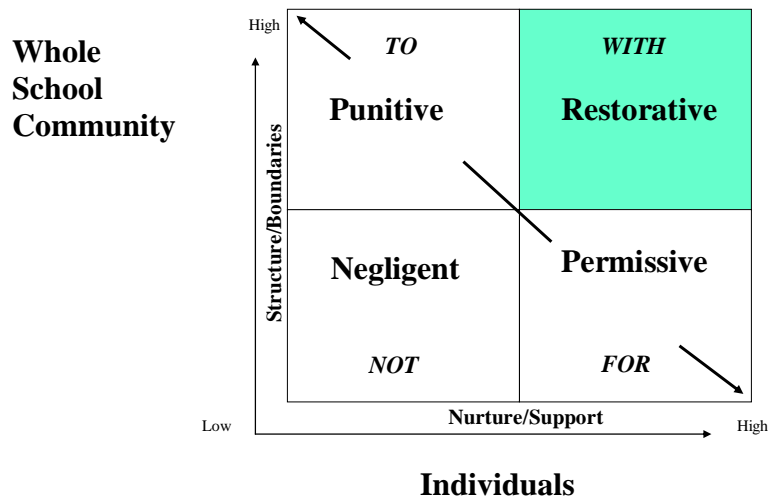
In Australia, Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) take the position that student learning, both academic and social, needs to be the core imperative of school leadership, '*The task of school leadership, is above all, to lead learning by creating and sustaining the conditions that maximize both academic and social learning*' (p.2). Schools need to maximise the conditions in which student, teacher, parent and community leadership; civic participation, and awareness of citizenship at a global level can develop. School

leadership in turn needs to be focused on the improvement of and spread of effective classroom practices or productive pedagogies. In schools making a difference, the shifting role of the school leadership is a critical factor. Their priority is assisting classroom teachers to manage the day to day difficulties and to develop the social and emotional literacy in their classroom. When teachers feel supported, they in turn are more likely to adopt new practice. One of the key factors influencing whether a student feels connected to their school is the quality of classroom management practices (Blum et al., 2004).

Darling-Hammond (1997:332 in Lingard et al. 2003) argues that an intellectually stimulating environment requires: '*A paradigm shift in how we think about the management and purpose of schools: from hierarchical, factory model institutions where teachers, treated as semi-skilled assembly line workers, process students for their slots in society, to professional communities where student success is supported by collaborative efforts of knowledgeable teachers who are organized to address the needs of diverse learners'* (p.21). For this to happen a paradigm shift is necessary. Leadership needs to be spread throughout the school. Lingard et al (2003) talk about the notion of teacher-leadership, where teachers individually and as a group are concerned with the learning not only in their classrooms but across the school, between schools and more broadly within the community. It also implies that we are all responsible for the educational outcomes within our schools and for the individuals that make up that school community. This in turn lends itself to team work and sharing the load in schools, rather than letting one teacher struggle with a difficult student or number of students. It is about breaking the conduit between the class and the person who usually is called in to 'fix' the problem. When we take a team approach, we are more likely to each be looking out for each other and assisting with the problem solving, beseeching a shift to case management within schools.

Wachtel and McCold, 2001: in Strang & Braithwaite, 2001, have provided a framework to help articulate this shift. The window of social control provides a useful point of reference when talking with schools about the need for this shift (see figure1).

Figure 1: Social Control Window (Wachtel and McCold,2001) Adapted by Blood, 2003.

Whole School Community

Diagram: A four-quadrant social control window. Vertical axis labeled "Structure/Boundaries" (Low to High). Horizontal axis labeled "Nurture/Support" (Low to High). Bottom label: "Individuals".

- Top-left quadrant: *TO* — **Punitive**
- Top-right quadrant (shaded green): *WITH* — **Restorative**
- Bottom-left quadrant: **Negligent** — *NOT*
- Bottom-right quadrant: **Permissive** — *FOR*

Individuals

Working restoratively or relationally provides an alternative option to the punitive/permissive scale, where most schools are attempting to strike a balance between the two. It is limiting in its orientation with an either or approach: we are either balanced or tilted too far one way or another. McGrath & Noble (2005) in Bullying Solutions seek to define strategies for effectively dealing with bullying along a punitive – non-punitive continuum, to the detriment of a number of the initiatives, including restorative practices which are defined as neither punitive nor non-punitive. This definition of practice is similar to the dilemma faced by educators and one that Kohn (1996), Glasser (1969), Lingard (2003) and others argue that we need to step outside of to find another way of dealing with things. Wachtel & McCold's (2001) social control window (drawn from Glasser's original concept) offers educators a chance to get off this continuum, where the relational quadrant provides the option to be both firm in terms of expectations and fair in our treatment of each other. In this domain, we are equally concerned with the needs of the school community and the needs of the individuals that coexist within that community. This requires necessary structure/ boundaries in place to maintain this community and sufficient support/nurture to ensure the individuals within the community thrive within that environment, an alignment not always met.

The Costs of Maintaining the Status Quo

In order to shift from one domain to another or change practice, we need to convince the community that we are working with, that this approach is better than or supports what already exists (Rogers,2003). As practitioners in the field, we need to know the lay of the land we are entering and take people on a journey to discover what will help make a difference in their environment. It is not enough to hope that they will make the leap themselves. We need to paint a picture for them. It is important for schools to understand the impact of maintaining the status quo of operating on a punitive - permissive continuum. An exploration of each of these domains will highlight the difficulties of having a preference for operating in any other domain other than the restorative/relational domain. The cost can also be drawn from the research on

compliance based models (Kohn 1996), overindulgence (Illsley Clarke, Dawson and Bredehoft 2004), bullying (Coloroso, 2002) and connectedness (Blum et al 2004), along with the analysis into the aftermath of student led school massacres (Morrison, forthcoming).

The Impact of Compliance Models

In Australia, early childhood expert Dr Louise Porter[1] talks about the notion of developing considerate young children as the basis to developing responsible young adults. Porter (2002) highlights how it can be dangerous to teach children to do as their told without questioning, by drawing on the work of Dr Freda Briggs who interviewed incarcerated perpetrators of sexual abuse. Briggs asked incarcerated paedophiles how they were able to perpetrate against so many children, before being discovered. Unanimously the response was that it was easy – because children were taught to do what an adult tells them to do. Children are at risk of others taking advantage of them, if they are unable to differentiate between right and wrong and make choices that are in the best interest of their own safety and development. To not do this, places them at risk from bullies who are more than happy to find unquestioning followers – the impact of which is currently being experienced worldwide with the increase in terrorism.

> *So teaching children to do as they're told is not a good enough aim for behaviour management. Instead what I'd like children to learn to do is to think for themselves, what I call to be considerate. Not to think what would happen to me if I get caught doing such and such misdeed but what effect would my behaviour have on other people.* (Porter, 2002)

Porter suggests that we need to be developing considerate young children who have the following skills:
- They need an autonomous (independent) *understanding of right and wrong* **–** in the absence of an adult telling them **(Personal Accountability)**
- They need to *manage their emotions* so that even when they don't feel like doing something they can manage to do it. A lot of young people feel that because they don't want to do it they don't have to **(Emotional Literacy)**
- They need to be able to work together to get the task done**.** Whether they are at school, playing sport, at home or in the community **(Cooperation)**
- They need a sense of *personal potency***:** that they know they can make a difference. Make decisions that affect them. Make a difference to other people and act on their knowledge of right and wrong **(Assertiveness and Responsibility).**

We need children to be able to think for themselves, to act on their own intrinsic motivation and to feel that they can make a difference to themselves and to others, that

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[1] Interview by Geraldine Doogue with Louise Porter (2002), ABC Radio National Life Matters. http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/lm/stories/s441942.htm

there are choices in life and consequences, dependent on what we do with that - skills that are essential for life.

Compliance itself is often short term and tends to be of a temporary nature or at the expense of the self worth of the individual involved. Compliance based models:

- teach a disturbing lesson about the misuse of power – as opposed to reason or cooperation. It teaches children that if you don't like something, do something bad to the other person until they give in.
- warp the relationship between the punisher and the punished – the caring alliance between child and adult is compromised and fails to address why a student is behaving the way they are. It stigmatises and labels the child.
- impede the process of ethical development. Generally punishment based models are based on adversarial thinking. That is the offence or wrongdoing is against the school (or system), is about rules and regulations and about appropriate consequences. It is overly offender focused and fails to address the harm that that behaviour may have caused to others (Kohn, 1996).

Punishment can be quick and easy and tends to be an automatic response for a lot of adults who grew up with that approach. It can make us feel more powerful and in-control and can satisfy a desire for justice because we fear they will be seen to 'get away with it'. But it fails to deliver the long term results and puts individuals, the school community and broader community at risk of further harm if we fail to address the contributing factors and the aftermath of when things go wrong. Harsh punishment and compliance based models lead to a student's sense of disconnectedness with their school community (Blum et al. 2002).

Disconnectedness

The level of that risk is immeasurable when we consider the potential impact when students feel disconnected from their school and their peers, as in the case of school massacres perpetrated by students. When a student feels so low, so miserable that they are driven to harm others so that others know what it feels like to be bullied, teased, taunted or treated horribly – it is a sad day. Research by the University of Minnesota (Blum et al. 2002) supports the notion that students who feel disconnected are more likely to harm themselves, harm others, abuse drugs and alcohol and to fall pregnant if they are female. A sense of connectedness to school is a protective factor and perhaps through the strengthening of relationships – one that encourages responsible citizenship and intrinsic motivation for learning and being at school.

The critical factors that contribute to a sense of connectedness include classroom management practices and social relationships across the school community. This includes relationships that go across ethnicity, age and gender where students actively embrace difference.

Social and Emotional Literacy

Social and emotional literacy has a lot to offer this debate. Weare (2004) outlines the type of schools that promote emotional literacy and the benefit this can have on students. She supports the view that emotions are central to effective learning and professional practice. A major study by Wubbels, Brekelmans and Hooymayers, 1991: Weare, 2004 demonstrated that students '*...did better, enjoyed learning more, were more motivated, and had better attendance if they felt their teachers understood them, and were helpful and friendly'*p.108. Positive staff-student relationships have a positive impact on student behaviour, a view that would seem to align to the connectedness research. To behave inappropriately is to cause harm to another, and we are less likely to do that if we respect the other person and the people around us.

Core to emotional literacy is:
- Creating warmth, person centeredness and involvement
- Developing empathic communication
- Encouraging autonomy and self-reliance
- Creating an emotionally literate physical environment
- Ensuring staff have high levels of emotional literacy and well-being
- Developing emotionally literate management and leadership, and
- Working with parents in emotionally literate ways.

So how can restorative practices help schools to achieve all this?

Restorative Practices

To practice restoratively we need to acknowledge the needs of people when they have been harmed and when they have caused the harm. Regardless, people need:
- to have a say
- to be heard
- to understand and be understood
- to make sense of what happened
- to know that what happened wasn't fair
- time to reflect
- to make amends
- to feel OK with themselves
- to repair relationships, and
- to bring about some sense of closure or completion.

Adversarial and punitive discipline systems don't take these into account. To highlight this I will tell you about Miguel, a year 9 student in Australia. Miguel described himself as 'bad' because he was suspended frequently and was very much a 'victim' of an adversarial system. He said that on every other occasion that he was in trouble, someone would take him aside, lecture him, suspend him and send him home. He would go home angry with the teachers, the people he had hurt and sit at home bored and angry because

he wasn't able to learn. He would re-enter the school angry at the completion of his time out and the process would start again the moment someone said or did something he didn't like. On the last occasion, a teacher took him aside and said that obviously what was happening wasn't working (short term compliance through suspension) and asked if he would be prepared to try something else. Miguel went along with this and responded to the teacher's question about what needed to happen to repair the harm. He thought he should say he was sorry, but didn't know how. With some guidance he decided to write sorry notes to the rest of the soccer team and to tell the class he was sorry, because he realized his behaviour had hurt a lot of people. He thought the class would laugh at him and asked for help to do this. The teacher obliged and stood beside him as he handed out his notes and addressed the class.

To his surprise, the class didn't laugh. Instead, many of them congratulated him on having the courage to say he was sorry. Many have since become his friends. He says he has anger management problems, but at the time of writing this – he hadn't come under notice again for disruptive or inappropriate behaviour. He said that for the first time, someone helped him find his way back from having done the wrong thing, in a way that he didn't feel bad or angry anymore. Before this, he didn't know how to save face, so he would get angry instead; in a typical *attack other* displacement of shame (Nathanson, 1992). He would recommend restorative practices to others and thought it was a good thing. The school that Miguel attends has come along way from what initially attracted them to restorative practices. For a while, restorative practices were done to him, as the school navigated the shift from a punitive authoritarian approach to a relational/restorative one. Miguel has given them great hope and a deeper understanding of what it is to work restoratively. To others he provides a vivid example of how a punitive approach to discipline can contribute to the very behaviour it is seeking to eliminate.

Much More than a Focus on Behaviour and Suspension

A recent reviewer of a journal article (Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005) believed that a proposed timeframe for change (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005) was unrealistic and that others had achieved the implementation of restorative practices in a far shorter period of time. The question in response is – what exactly was achieved and what outcomes were they looking for? Are we working at a surface level or are we about assisting schools to change their operating framework. In Australia, we have demonstrated that it is relatively easy to reduce suspension rates within schools due to the implementation of restorative practices in a short period of time. Typically, suspension rates will be more than halved in a 12 month period. Normally, a small percentage of the school population is repeatedly suspended. Internal statistics keep by schools indicates that this group will be reduced slightly in terms of numbers, whilst having a dramatic effect on the number of times they come under notice, for increasingly diminishing incidents. So the same group of students may come under notice, whilst we are having a gradual impact on the seriousness of their behaviours. As in the case of Miguel, he was one student who contributed regularly to the suspension statistics. By taking him out of the equation, the

stats will look a lot better. If suspension rates and repeat behaviour are our only measure, we are likely to miss the opportunity for change at a deeper and more impacting level. As in the case of one of the first high schools to adopt restorative practices in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT); after two years they decided they had had enough focus on behaviour and needed to concentrate on other things. They are now back on board, as they realize the change did not go far enough.

This is not surprising when you consider Bouhours (2004) analysis of international and Australian suspension data. Students are most likely to be suspended for acts of defiance than they are for serious offences such as bullying or violence. Telling a teacher off, being caught smoking or being disruptive are far more heinous offences. In my mind, this indicates that this is about a power struggle between student and teacher or school and student body. In recently being called into troubleshoot student difficulties at a tertiary college, the main complaint from teachers was getting students to smoke in the right place. The power tug of war that emerged over this led to an entire breakdown in student-teacher relationships and an ineffective teaching environment. Getting those teachers to a place where they value relationships above a compliance model is not an easy task – especially when they feel disconnected from the very environment in which they teach.

The implementation of Restorative Practices in Australian schools

Australia has pioneered the use of restorative practices in schools since the first school based conference was held in Queensland in 1994. Prior to this O'Connell had used conferencing and large group problem solving to deal with matters involving school students that had come to the attention of police. More broadly there is evidence of practitioners working in schools to educate students about the principals of restorative justice.

Initially practice was focused at the 'pointy' end of the system dealing with significant issues of harm and disruption in the school community. A conference would be held for the wrongdoers, those harmed and/or involved with their significant others to deal with what had happened, take responsibility, acknowledge the harm and in some way work together to repair that harm. Conferencing is and has been a successful initiative within schools to address significant issues, but has also been difficult to sustain for reasons raised in the three evaluated trials of conferencing within schools in Australia. Each of the studies (Queensland Education Dept, 1996), New South Wales (McKenzie, 1999) and Victoria (Shaw & Wierenga, 2002) demonstrated that conferencing is highly effective for responding to inappropriate behaviour of a serious nature in schools. While the effectiveness of this "high end" restorative process in responding to harmful behaviour is no longer in doubt, what has become clear is that the use of conferencing itself is not enough to achieve the sorts of positive changes to school behaviour management policy and practice that it seemed to promise in the early studies. What the process of conferencing *has* highlighted for schools and practitioners is that efforts which focus only on reactive responses to wrongdoing have limited impact in achieving these changes.

The ACT Story

Schools within the Australian Capital Territory who are in the process of implementing restorative practices understand this paradigm shift and that this requires cultural change. They are in there for the long haul, knowing that it is a 3-5 year journey that they are undertaking. The positive indicators are that restorative practices have become a platform for cultural change as schools increasingly understand the shift that is required to move from the management of inappropriate behaviours, to a school that values relationships. What is unique about the ACT is a strategic approach and the layers of implementation across the system. Mountford (2005) has described this as a four layered process to implementing restorative practices, with essence of the change process involving:

1. engaging and establishing leadership commitment to the implementation of restorative practices
2. the development of localised expertise and support networks
3. density of quality restorative practice in schools, and
4. planning for sustainability.

The approach that is occurring in the system is being mirrored in schools, and replicates change management processes described by Rogers (2003).

From the outset, the implementation has involved working with the volunteers – those schools that wanted to find out more about restorative practices.   Change has been demanded from the bottom up, with schools initiating the grass roots change in both the ACT and Western Australia (WA). Through effective practice, this has forced other schools and the departments to take notice. One recent director in a 12 month study on effective behaviour management practices continually heard how restorative practices worked from school based staff. A multi pronged approach is leading the ACT towards sustainable practice which involves developing the capacity of practitioners on the ground through a mix of internal and external professional development and support. This includes:

- One Day Introductory Forums (to establish awareness and buy-in)
- Training in Restorative Practices (formal and informal practices)
- Circles & Classroom Management Training & Help Increase the Peace (social/emotional and relationship strengthening initiatives)
- Whole school/cluster workshops (strengthening connections between schools)
- Facilitated workshops (whole school community)
- Parent Sessions
- Regular forums (networking/up-skilling school personnel)
- Implementation teams in schools/clusters
- Support staff – trained as change agents with developing expertise in the range of restorative practices
- Mix of external & internal professional development

Whilst working directly with schools who have indicated a need or desire to pursue working restoratively, we are also working with the department support services and have

offered ongoing flooding of the principles of restorative justice through one day introductory workshops. These workshops allow new schools and other sections to find out more and for existing schools to send new staff along to gain an understanding or practice from the so called 'experts'.

School based professional development has been a mix of internal and external training, of mentoring, forums, workshops and facilitated sessions. Schools are at the stage of developing their own implementation teams, who have the opportunity to meet once each term to take their practice to a new level. Student support services are trained and being mentored to become the change agents within schools. They are the people who are in and out of schools and have the opportunity to guide practice. A number of leading practitioner roles have been created to assist this process. Implementation focuses at each level of one side of pyramid and is now being expanded to think about the other sides of implementation, as discussed by Morrison (forthcoming). Separating out the stages of implementation is assisting schools to know that they do not have to do everything at once – that they can be strategic in their approach; also embedded within this model is the notion that adult behaviour must be changed first. Students are developing the skills to manage conflict and disruption through teachers' role modelling effective and fair process and also explicit discussion about restorative practices – not being trained in it before the adults have the chance to practice effectively themselves.

Whilst there has been no formal evaluation, there are some encouraging indicators of change.

- formal school leaders are in classrooms, modelling effective teaching and learning practice and supporting their staff in the implementation
- schools have developed their own implementation team who are driving the change
- less need for the formal interventions and a much greater emphasis on the social/emotional practices in the classroom
- teachers are working across class and content area to work with other colleagues and to share their emerging practice
- independent, religious and government schools are working together as they share resources and a passion for working relationally
- teachers are going into other schools to model best practice, reducing the involvement of the consultants
- the capacity to implement is growing from within and not reliant on the external consultant as much as in the beginning days: experienced staff, with a little tutoring are now doing the introductory and follow-up workshops and discovering new ways of making the linkages clear for schools
- emotional and social literacy has become a priority for these schools
- schools are maintaining a long term focus and integrating new learning into existing practice, rather than losing focus with each new 'fad'
- professional development involves a mix of internal and external facilitators
- schools are building partnerships with community and becoming the centre of that community

- reduction in suspension rates and re-offending reduced – 70% and higher (High Schools). When a student is dealt with restoratively they are not repeating the same behaviour in most instances (de-escalation).
- cultural change occurring amongst student body and becoming evident among staff
- increased reporting of incidents (primary and high school) as students feel safe & out of shared concern, with a change in culture from dobbing to requesting assistance for self/other
- improved problem solving and conflict resolution skills amongst students
- shift from punitive to relational approach - focus on relationships and the harm that occurs through inappropriate behaviour
- development of internal change agents leading to a sustainable model
- reduction in need to conference in all schools within 6 – 12 months
- creative problem solving and range of options increasing, and
- parents are seen as partners in the problem solving and solution, rather than the cause of it.

Conversely, schools that are struggling with implementation exhibit the following signs:

- the leader is out of touch with the classroom
- they are overly focused on conferencing
- do not involve the broader community
- have a new focus each term or year without building on the existing body of knowledge
- do not see teachers as the leaders within the school
- tell people what to do, under the guise of an authoritarian role
- the rate of referral upwards is not diminishing
- the feedback loop is non existent, as teachers feel out of touch with what is happening
- have only focused on either internal development or completely external training, not a mix. Teachers need access to both, to hear it from their colleagues and directly from those with expertise in the area.

Restorative Practices as a platform for cultural change.

Morrison (2001) asked whether school systems could play an important role in the development and maintenance of a civil society, through the adoption of restorative justice practices. By understanding that schools have an important developmental capacity in a child's and young adult's life it opens the door for how the implementation of restorative practices can assist in building social capital. In answer to Morrison's question – the answer is yes; schools do have an important role to play in building social capital and restorative practices can assist schools. That is the easy part. Making sense of this and linking this to the priorities of educationalists is the challenging part. In order to achieve this we need to be authorities in our own field as well as understanding the environment we are engaged to work with. The modern day restorative practitioner

needs a solid grounding in restorative practices; culture change, leadership, productive pedagogies and the various theories and practices that inform education. Of course, we don't all come equipped with this kit bag of practice and knowledge, which is why it is pivotal that we share our learning and build on the existing body of expertise that is emerging within our education departments and among the people supporting them in their practice.

Conclusion

Emerging practice in Australia and internationally within schools has a lot to offer other areas of restorative justice. Schools understand that there are a complex set of interactions and that we won't change behaviour overnight. It needs to be part of a broader understanding of the environment in which we work. Restorative practices can be and are being used successfully as a platform for cultural change – no matter what the entry point into a school or other environment. Near enough is not good enough when we are playing with people's emotions and their relationships with one another. At times we need to guide those people on a journey, at times we have to step back because they are not ready or willing to go there. We can only support people along the pathway and be ethical in our own practice.

Working in the field of Restorative Justice implies that we uphold the principles of that field: respect, inclusivity, collaboration, tolerance, understanding, compassion and as Hopkins (2003) suggests that we are congruent in what we say we do and in practice. Above all else we seek to right the wrongs (Zehr, 2002) which may mean that we have some cleaning up to do ourselves. These values do win out in the end.

In terms of our practice with schools and other organizations, it is also onerous on us as practitioners to think more broadly about our practice. We are poised to assist any workplace, organization, school or community to undertake a process of cultural change – if we understand the environment that best fosters restorative practices – one that values relationships above all else. In families, workplaces, schools, community groups – when we get the relationships right, we can then get on with the business that we are there to achieve.

About the Author:

Peta Blood is a former police officer who currently works with a number of states and territories within Australia on the implementation of restorative practices in schools. She is among the leading practitioners working nationally and internationally to enhance the development of practice in many contexts, with a particular focus on working in an educational context. She is a member of the advisory board of Emotional Literacy Australia and is currently working towards the development of an international restorative practices association. She is the Director of Circle Speak, Sydney Australia and can be reached at circlespeak@optusnet.com.au

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