

May 2009

Newsletter



Special points of interest:

- **Restorative Practice**

- ◆ Traditional school discipline systems

- ◆ Restorative practice as an alternative

- ◆ Implications for teachers

Restorative Practices – Reflections on research

Tom Cavanagh. (2009). 'Creating Schools of Peace and Nonviolence in a Time of War and Violence' *Journal of School Violence*, 8:64–80, pp. 1–29

Kia ora tatou, talofa lava, malo e lelei, greetings.

Whilst preparing for a Beginning Teacher workshop, I came across this article, which I thought some of the readers of this newsletter may find interesting.

Cavanagh's premise is that a restorative practice perspective will see Western societies as promoting values of war and violence. He believes that these values influence schools, even New Zealand schools, through their disciplinary systems. This is a controversial starting position. A brief summary of his arguments may help to determine whether he has a point.

An American scholar currently based at the Waikato University, Cavanagh spent time in an American school, undertaking his Doctoral research into restorative practices. He mirrored this research at a New Zealand school whilst on a Fulbright scholarship.

Traditional school discipline systems

Following the idea that values of war and violence dominate Western thought (and influence schooling), Cavanagh suggests that traditional school discipline is punitive and seeks retribution. In these systems, minority, marginalised and special needs students are overrepresented in statistics such as detentions, stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions.

His research notes inconsistency between the vision statements and behaviour management systems in the schools he studied.

These traditional systems favour punishment, and are characterised by adversarial relationships and power imbalances.

Punishment has a focus on retribution (the bad guy gets what he deserves) and rewarding good behaviour. In this climate, labelling of students is common, and once a dog has a bad name, it sticks forever – so the past counts, and presumably, it would matter little if the offender kept out of trouble in the future.

Adversarial relationships develop from retribution, and play out negatively, with an unwillingness to mend bridges or to see students as worthy. Here labelling can fall into deficit ways of thinking about students and their life chances.

Power imbalances exist on the staff, not allowing teachers to solve their own discipline issues. This disabling of teachers is frequently seen, says Cavanagh, in schools that have what I call 'food-chain referral systems'. These are systems that require teachers to refer their discipline problems to middle or senior management staff members.

In such systems, not only is the teacher disabled, but the view is that once a teacher has referred a child, there is no obligation on the senior managers to advise the teacher of the outcome.

Restorative practice as an alternative

Cavanagh builds his argument for restorative practices around several themes, some of which are highlighted here. These themes, he argues, are based on values of peace and non-violence.

Building trust

Consistent relationships are at the centre of a trusting classroom environment, where boundaries are set and curriculum does not take precedence, but follows from these. Teachers are fair and treat all students equally, helping them to enjoy success and see themselves as successful.

Restorative practice is therefore not a soft option for students, and nor is it a type of discipline; rather, it is a way of life in the class and school.

Healing harm

In moments of wrongdoing, relationships are harmed. Restorative practice has a focus on healing these hurts. The wrongdoer, despite causing harm, should be freed from the threat of retributive harm ("NOW you're in BIG trouble!") However, the wrongdoer must still take responsibility for healing the relationships hurt by wrongdoing.

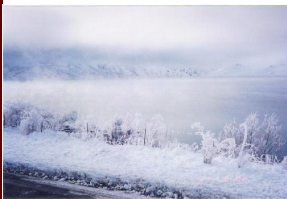
The wrongdoer is put on a steep learning curve; learning firstly how to apologise, and then learning from the mistakes made, so as not to repeat them.

Community

The restorative teacher builds a community of learning in which a sense of solidarity is developed - from this perspective, it makes little sense to exclude any but the most serious transgressors.

Cavanagh suggests a buddy system, which could be within a class or across the school. This system also helps to build community.

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Safety

What Cavanagh calls 'safety' may be better called 'security' in the sense that a secure environment exists, where students are free to be who they are (as individuals) and what they are (as a group). In this environment, students are acknowledged and mentored, and their achievements are celebrated and honoured. A restorative teacher will take an active interest in the culture of the students.

Implications for teachers

What should a teacher/school engaging in restorative practice look like?

- ◆ Build relationships: key points to remember here are to build trust, be consistent and don't go back on your word.
- ◆ Change pedagogy to dialogical/discursive: teachers who instruct from the front are unlikely to make good models of restorative practice - they'll be too authoritarian!
- ◆ Focus on student achievement: should go without saying, but really presupposes a person with high expectations who cares passionately for the students
- ◆ Create a learning community: links into the points above. Key point is solidarity/team messages.
- ◆ Coach and support peers who are struggling with discipline: a good restorative teacher will readily collaborate with other teachers looking for help.

Business Activity

May 09

Business Activity

May activity:

- Beginning Teacher development
- Appraisals (Principal level)
- Teacher Only Days on the NZC
- On-going NZC implementation work
- Staff workshops
- BOT consultation on NZC

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Client Schools

- James Cook High School
- Kowhai Intermediate
- St Dominic's College
- Excellere College
- Kaikohe West School
- Whangarei Intermediate School
- Holy Family School, Porirua
- St Pius X School
- Park Estate School
- St Mary's School, Avondale
- Whau Valley School, Whangarei
- Kaikohe Christian School
- Wesley College
- Elim Christian College

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