The Challenge of Culture Change:
Embedding Restorative Practice in Schools.

Peta Blood and Margaret Thorsborne

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Contact Details:

Peta Blood
Circle Speak
PO BOX 24
Broadway NSW 2007
Australia
Ph/Fax: +61 2 9402 1273
Mob: 0418 298 875
Web: www.circlespeak.com.au
Email: circlespeak@optusnet.com.au

Margaret Thorsborne & Associates
4 Kimbarra Court
Buderim QLD 4556
Australia
Phone:+61 7 54453520
Fax: +61 7 54452857
Mobile: 0412 135 015
Web: www.thorsborne.com.au
Email: marg@thorsborne.com.au

Introduction

The emergence of restorative practices within educational settings has flourished since the first school based conference was held in a Queensland (Australia) school in 1994, (in Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Several studies (Queensland Education Dept, 1996), New South Wales (NSW Department of Education, 1997: Strang, 2001) and Victoria (Shaw & Wierenga, 2002) have demonstrated that Conferencing is a highly effective process 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.

In recent years, to overcome the limited impact of conferencing on school policy, both authors have been developing more comprehensive approaches to implementation by focusing on the integration of restorative philosophy, practices and principles into the wider school culture of behaviour management. As Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) suggest, restorative practices '…*focus our attention on relationships between <u>all members of the school community</u> and teaches us the value of relationships in achieving quality outcomes for students.*' p.193. This has allowed a more proactive approach in order to create the best environment for the development of healthy relationships across the school community, so critical for the delivery of improved student learning outcomes (See Lingard et al.2002, Blum et al. 2002, and Weare, 2004).

Schools practising a restorative philosophy have discovered that most of their restorative activities have fallen within a continuum of practices (Wachtel, 1999)which range from formal (eg conferencing) to informal responses (circles, classroom and corridor conferences, peer mediation etc). This continuum assists schools to more effectively manage conflict and disruptions in corridors, playgrounds and classrooms. These practices, while extremely effective in their response to wrongdoing, are still reactive. Effective behaviour management is the result of many interacting and complex factors, not the least of which are relevant, engaging curriculum and productive pedagogies. Restorative practice, with its emphasis on relationships, demands that schools attend to all aspects of the school culture and organisation and that they develop a range of relational practices that help prevent incidents of inappropriate behaviour from arising in the first place. To achieve these broader outcomes, we propose an extension of Wachtel's continuum of practices to include the relational building activities that need to precede and complement these practices. This in turn requires a shift away from punitive practice to a relational approach.

The authors (with a collective experience of 20 years between them in this field) and the schools they have worked with, have come to the conclusion that, while the implementation of carefully thought out strategy is vital, one of the critical issues for

successful implementation and sustainability of a restorative philosophy is the realisation that this means organisational and cultural change.

This paper seeks to broaden the perspectives of senior and middle management and restorative practitioners around what restorative practice in schools can look like; and to present some practical guidelines which represent a strategic approach to the implementation of restorative practices, so that they "stick" – that is, become sustainable. It represents a work in progress and the authors encourage readers to engage with them in ongoing dialogue about the issues (we don't know all the answers yet!) and share with us their butterfly (successes) and bullfrog (failures) stories, in meeting the challenges of developing a restorative culture within schools (Zehr, 2003). It should be noted that there is an overwhelming body of literature (Hargreaves, 1997, Fullan, 2000 etc) dealing with school reform, effective teaching, classroom and behaviour management practice and that this paper focuses on the *implementation of restorative practice* in schools. We would like to acknowledge the efforts of schools throughout Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom that have contributed to the development of a range restorative practices and the body of knowledge about what works and what doesn't.

Culture change

Before describing a practical, strategic approach in this paper, we would like to emphasise that the introduction of restorative practice challenges deeply held beliefs around notions of discipline and authority. A traditional approach to these concepts focuses on the apportioning of blame, establishing which school rule has been violated and making wrongdoers accountable by punishing them. In these more traditional schools, policy, while espousing philosophies around care and respect, often lists categories of offences and appropriate tariffs to be imposed as sanctions. Most of us grew up with this tradition and have practiced our teaching and behaviour management in ways which reflect these beliefs, despite holding values about people and relationships which are often in conflict with these practices. Taking up restorative practice, then, can challenge us in ways that may cause professional and personal discomfort, even pain.

Restorative practices focus our attention on the quality of relationships between all members of the school community. Repairing the harm necessarily forces us to learn from the experience that has led to the conflict and examine our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which have contributed to it. This challenging of mindsets is where true culture change begins. And far from wanting to overwhelm readers with the enormity of the task of setting about changing culture in a traditional structure, we offer first some advice from prevailing management theory about culture change so that well meaning effort, energy and enthusiasm are not wasted. We both know from bitter experience the heartache involved in the failure of an organisation to recognise a good idea when they see one (despite our best efforts), and the loss of the possibilities of useful change. Best then, we understand this concept of culture change at greater depth before setting about developing the reform strategy for our school.

Culture has been defined in many ways, but perhaps the simplest definition we have found is *the way we do things around here* (Ouchi and Johnson, 1978: Simpson, 2004).

Simpson (2003) refers to cultural cues, for example, which new staff are confronted with. We have adapted some of the cues from his list for the school setting and added a number of others for consideration:

- how management speak to staff
- how staff speak about the management in their absence
- how management and staff speak about students and parents
- what are the patterns of communication are like in staff meetings and what is said immediately after a meeting
- how criticism and disagreement are handled
- how the school invites, promotes and supports initiatives and individual vision
- how the school responds to identified need amongst students or staff

What are the cues in your school which signal its culture?

Corporate Culture, a consultancy and pioneer of culture work in Australia, agrees, defining culture as:

> *Culture is the result of messages that are received about what is really valued. People align their behaviour to these messages in order to fit in. Changing culture requires a systematic and planned change to these messages, whose sources are behaviour, symbols and systems.* Taylor, 2004, p. 3

Taylor encourages us to understand that culture management (and therefore culture change) is about message management. Executive staff and those considered amongst the leadership group are watched by others. Their actions send messages to people about what is expected around the school, as are the messages from symbols: actions, decisions and situations visible to a large number of people from which they make meaning. Even small events can send big messages (eg how a senior manager might respond to a student sent to them by a classroom teacher for "punishment"). Highly visible symbols such as school priorities, school uniforms, where resources are allocated, and facilities tell us 'what is important around here', and conversely what is ignored.

Lee (2004), an Australian authority on leadership development and organisational change, agrees with Taylor's assertion that culture change is more effective when transformational in nature and begins with the organisation's leadership:

> *...transformational process will change mind-sets, target values and build a culture which can truly support new strategies and organisational aspirations. However it can only be driven by passionate and persistent leadership at the top. Therefore, transformational change begins with transforming the mind-sets of managers*. p.39.

He does however warn us that organisations with a traditional culture no longer produce anywhere close to the results required. It is also clear that such cultures are extremely resilient and, in fact, highly resistant to change. Those of us who have worked in schools with entrenched cultures can only agree that sometimes in such places this culture is hard to shift. More reason then, to take a strategic approach which first captures the hearts and minds of the school leadership.

Leading the Way

> *The most significant determinant of your organisation's culture will be the leadership style of managers at all levels.* Lee, 2004, p.39.

In our experience, successful implementation is heavily dependent on the quality and passion of the leadership in general within the school. Ignoring this will risk the rapid addition of any initiatives to the 'been there, done that – didn't work' list. However, the authors acknowledge that leadership can be found at any levels within the school community and therefore is not so heavily dependent on one person. Sometimes it takes the enthusiasm of a few to build a critical mass of advocates that can move things along.

Kouzes and Posner (1997) suggest five fundamental practices that enable leaders to get extraordinary things done and to change the business-as-usual environment. They include:

- Challenge the process
- Inspire a shared vision
- Enable others to act
- Model the way, and
- Encourage the heart

These leadership qualities are as important for pioneers of restorative practice in schools as they are for the school leadership. They too must engage the school community (or at least those within their sphere of influence) in useful dialogue about behaviour management in general and the restorative philosophy in particular. This means that they might have to manage upwards and may need to be taught/coached/mentored how to do this effectively.

The following stages of implementation integrate these points and draw on other evidence based research on cultural change. The idea of five core stages draws on the work of the former Restorative Justice Group, NSW Police Service in the development of the Behaviour Change Program, a major reform initiative for the NSW Police Service (Blood, Casey, Herring, O'Connell and Ritchie, 1997), and on the work of leading culture change experts such as Lee, 2004, Taylor, 2004, and Simpson, 2004.

Stages of Implementation

It is important to understand that cultural change does not happen overnight and that a long term strategic approach usually over 3 -5 years is required if change is to be sustained (See table 2: Timeframe and Indicators of Change). The following stages are not necessarily linear in their implementation and overlap each other. For example, Stage 5 – Developing Professional Working Relationships - runs concurrently with all other stages. We would also like to stress that the transition from one culture to another can be fraught with frustration, anxiety, confusion, cynicism and resentment. Managing the emotional impact of change will be every bit as important as putting new structure and practices in place. Further comment about managing the transition will be found later in the paper.

Table 1: Stages of Implementation

Stage 1:
 	
 Gaining Commitment – *Capturing Hearts and Minds*
	1. Making a case for change
	   1.1. Identifying the need (the cost of current practice)
	   1.2. Identifying learning gaps
	   1.3. Challenging current practice
	   1.4. Debunking the myths around behaviour management and what makes a difference
	   1.5. Linking to other priorities
	 2. Establishing buy-in

Stage 2: **Developing a Shared Vision** – *Knowing where we are going and why*	1. Inspiring a shared vision 2. Developing preferred outcomes aligned with the vision 3. Building a Framework for Practice 4. Developing a common language
Stage 3: **Developing Responsive and Effective Practice** – *Changing how we do things around here*	1. Developing a range of responses 2. Training, maintenance and support 3. Monitoring for quality standards
Stage 4: **Developing a Whole School Approach** – *Putting it all together*	1. Realignment of school policy with new practice 2. Managing the Transition 3. Widening the lens
Stage 5: **Professional Relationships** – *Walking the talk with each other*	1. Promoting open, honest, transparent and fair working relationships 2. Using restorative processes for managing staff grievance, performance management and

	conflict 3. Challenging practice and behaviour – building integrity

Because there is insufficient space in this paper to expand the summary in Table 1 in great detail, we have instead posed some useful questions and made suggestions that will hopefully broaden perspectives on the complexities of the change process.

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	   1.5. Linking to other priorities
	2. Establishing buy-in

1. Making a case for change

Lee (2004) reminds us that the culture within traditional hierarchical structures is difficult to change. Gaining commitment in this kind of climate therefore requires a comprehensive and systematic approach. We have found it helpful to consider the following steps:

1.1. Identifying the need (the cost of current practice) – this involves the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. This data will be determined by system and school priorities, and will vary from school to school. We offer the following list as tentative suggestions only. For example:

> **Qualitative data** – wide dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of current practice – conversations in staff rooms and staff meetings, student and parent feedback, school reviews, union involvement

> **Quantitative data** –survey data eg bullying, student safety and well-being/mental health; exclusion and suspension rates, detention rates, overuse of time-out facilities, number of students reported/sent to the office, student absences, staff absences, stress/sick leave, measures of student engagement/disengagement, academic results, retention figures.

> (We strongly advise however that building the case for the implementation of Restorative Practices is much more complex than relying on statistics that

indicate that restorative conferencing works; or relating only to data such as detention and suspension rates which are only a small indicator of any school's culture.)

1.2. Identifying learning gaps – what don't we know about best practice and what do we know, but don't practice?

1.3. Challenging current practice – what's working, what isn't and what shows promise, and what are the beliefs and values which underpin our practice, and do these contradict our practice?

1.4. Debunking the myths around behaviour management and what makes a difference – what does best practice look like?

1.5. Linking to other priorities – identifying system and school priorities which can be more readily achieved by adopting restorative practices

2. Establishing buy-in

- Share school data and RJ research with senior and middle managers (the gatekeepers in disciplinary matters), student support and welfare services, governing bodies, parent bodies, local government and other agencies

For those of you involved in system wide implementation, buy-in at senior levels of your agency is rather more complex and will not be addressed in this paper.

Stage 2: **Developing a Shared Vision –** *Knowing where we are going and why*	1. Inspiring a shared vision 2. Developing preferred outcomes aligned with the vision 3. Building a Framework for Practice 4. Developing a common language

Key people must be clear about the organisational goals – what the organisation will look like when they get there, what they want to measure, how this will happen and why it is important. But more than anything, they must understand that this will mean, in all likelihood, a change in the culture – that is, '*how we do things around here*'?

1. **Inspiring a shared vision** – engaging whole school community in effective processes to determine short, medium and long term goals for the organisation. It is imperative that this is values based and grounded in best practice and understanding of local needs. External consultants often facilitate this process with staff and the broader school community

2. **Developing preferred outcomes aligned with the vision** – from a relationship management perspective, these outcomes might look like:

- ➢ Shift towards positive relationship management
- ➢ Balance between prevention, intervention and crisis management
- ➢ Improvement in statistics (detention, time-out, suspensions, exclusions, absenteeism).
- ➢ Increased options for managing behaviour
- ➢ Staff who are struggling with discipline are identified early and supported in meaningful ways
- ➢ Quality and nature of the dialogue about kids is supportive - not blaming
- ➢ Case management approach to problem-solving for issues about individual students
- ➢ Classroom teachers solve more issues themselves
- ➢ Students are self-regulating and better problem-solvers
- ➢ Survey data shows improvements over a variety of measures (eg safety, wellbeing, school connectedness, staff morale and stress levels, parent satisfaction)
- ➢ Greater engagement in curriculum
- ➢ Increased retention rates

3. **Building a Framework for Practice –** It is important for senior and middle management and staff to be able to conceptualise in an uncomplicated way, a framework with helps to make sense of how restorative practices might help achieve the schools vision for a values based relational culture.

This is best illustrated in figure 1 in Blood's (2004) Building Social Capital model, adapted from Wachtel (1999).
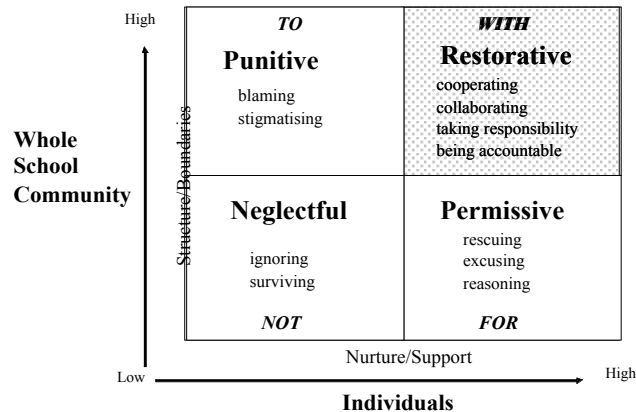

Figure 1: Building Social Capital, Adapted from Wachtel,T (1999).

The vertical axis refers to the structure and boundaries necessary to maintain the good order of the whole school community, including classrooms and playgrounds. The

horizontal axis relates to the support and nurture that all members of the school community need. The four quadrants describe teacher practice, as outlined below:

- ❖ Practice which lacks structure and support is seen as neglectful – (NOT engaging at any level)
- ❖ Practice which is high in control and low on support (relationships) is experienced as authoritarian and punitive – (doing things TO people / power over)
- ❖ Practice which is low on control and high on support is experienced as permissive – (doing things FOR people / disempowering / non challenging)
- ❖ Practice which maintains high standards and boundaries at the same time as being supportive is experienced as firm and fair – (working WITH others).

The model allows us to more easily identify ineffective practice and confirm the ideal (the top right hand quadrant), giving direction to our efforts for organisational change and reaching our preferred outcomes. It also dispels a common misconception that restorative practice is a soft option.

4. **Developing a common language** - one of the most recognisable aspects of any organisation's culture is the language used by management and staff about their work, their clients (students and parents) and each other. The framework outlined in Figure 1 assists the school community to develop a common language that both shapes the culture and is an indicator of organisational movement towards its preferred future. The community can move away from using blaming, stigmatising, excusing, rescuing, helpless language and move towards more relational language which will in turn influence practice. Language is everything, but means nothing without congruent behaviour (walking the talk).

Stage 3: **Developing Responsive and Effective Practice** – *Changing how we do things around here*	1. Developing a range of responses 2. Training. maintenance and support 3. Monitoring for quality standards

Enabling all staff to respond effectively to classroom disruptions, playground incidents and conflict without the need to refer upwards is a key issue for senior managers. In a restorative sense, this requires a clear understanding of who owns the problem and how it can be resolved at the lowest possible level in the most effective way. Schools have discovered very quickly that many problems can be eliminated or minimised with thoughtful application of a continuum of relational practices from proactive to reactive.

1. Developing a range of responses

The hierarchy of proactive to reactive processes is probably best illustrated by Morrison's (2004) model, (adapted slightly for this paper) shown in Figure 2. Morrison, describing three levels of intervention: universal, targeted and intensive, likens the interventions to a health care model and continuum:

Briefly, these levels of response form a continuum of responses, based on common principles. By way of analogy to a health care model, the universal *level of intervention targets all members of the school community through an 'immunization' strategy; such that, all members of the school community develop social and emotional skills to resolve conflict in caring and respectful ways. The* targeted *level of intervention addresses conflict that has become protracted such that it is affecting others within the school community, as such a third party is often required to help facilitate the process of reconciliation. The* intensive *level of intervention typically involves the participation of an even wider cross section of the school community, including parents, guardians, social workers, and others who have been affected or need to be involved, when serious offences occur within the school. A face-to-face restorative justice (community) conference is a typical example of this level of response. Taken together, these practices move from proactive to reactive, along a continuum of responses. Movement from one end of the continuum to the other involves widening the circle of care around participants. The emphasis is on early intervention through building a strong base at the primary level, which grounds a normative continuum of responsive regulation across the school community.*

INTENSIVE
e.g. Conferencing,
Mediation

1-5% of population

RE-
BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS

TARGETED
e.g. Classroom,
Sm.Grp. & Individual
Conferences

REPAIRING
RELATIONSHIPS

UNIVERSAL
e.g. Social &
Emotional Skills
Programs

RE-AFFIRMING
RELATIONSHIPS
THROUGH DEVELOPING
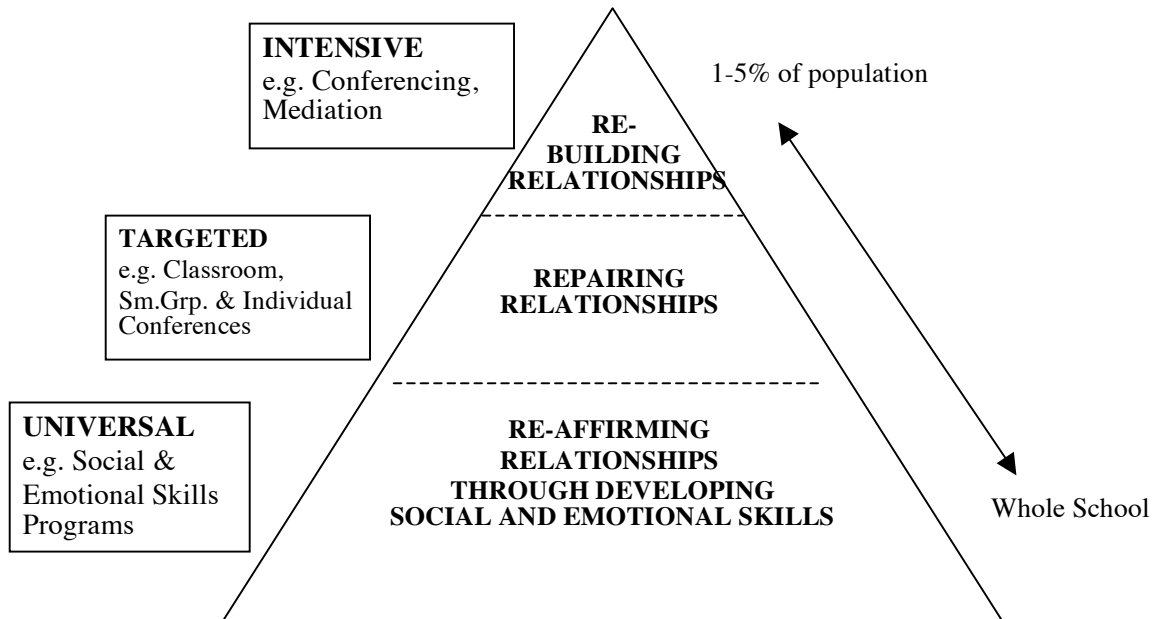SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Whole School

Figure 2: Hierarchy of Restorative Responses, Morrison (2004)

If we are to move beyond restorative practice being seen as a reactive response to significant issues of harm, then we must focus our attention on preventative and proactive strategies. It is not our intention to expand on these strategies in further detail here, but it is clear that any exploration of behaviour management will inevitably lead to discussions about curriculum and pedagogy. Understanding the linkages between these three issues will become a critical part of implementation of restorative practice based on relational values. Proactive responses are often informed by what is happening within the school environment. Many of the problems encountered in a typical school day are frequently misdiagnosed if not viewed through a relational lens and its exploration of factors contributing to relationship breakdown. For example: problems on playgrounds are often personalised and viewed as non-compliance by an individual or groups of students. Restorative dialogue with the 'offending' parties often reveals factors which can be remedied without resorting to punishment (eg. a lack of social skills, not knowing the game rules, boredom, poor allocation of play space or the lack of equipment etc).

Part of the leadership commitment to change must therefore be to provide adequate resources for high quality *ongoing* professional development and dialogue. Engaging all staff at this level and maintaining an ongoing dialogue about the issues which emerge will assist in the development of a climate of cooperation and collaboration, so necessary for cultural change.

2. **Training, maintenance and support** – there are a number of issues that need consideration:

- Model of training to be used (given adult learning needs)
- Who gets trained and in what order
- Costs of training and funding sources
- Induction programs for new staff, students, parents and relief teachers
- Collegial support for preparation, facilitation and debriefing for high level interventions eg conferences, and more informal interventions
- Supportive approach to supervision of restorative practice
- Access to latest research/reading
- Provision of high quality ongoing PD
- Developing a range of proactive responses
- Networking with other schools and experts at various forums

3. Monitoring for quality standards – Schools, like most organisations, still grapple with effective performance management and development. Without this it is difficult to sustain new practice and it is easy to slip back into old habits, when something doesn't work the first time, rather than learn from the experience. The acquisition of new skills requires coaching in a climate of encouragement, honest feedback and support particularly when we are shifting from ingrained traditional approaches to restorative practice.

The collection of data (objective measures) will assist in determining what is working, not working, progress towards preferred outcomes and where support is most needed eg. referrals to the withdrawal facility which can identify the 'frequent flyers' amongst both students *and* staff; or increased disclosure of harm by students to welfare teams, as they start to trust the process. The type of data collected will be informed by the visioning processes in stage 2 and can be fed into a continuous improvement loop.

The adoption of a continuous improvement loop can be very much enhanced by professional dialogue with staff in other schools facing the same challenges to implementation. This will be discussed further in Stages 4 & 5.

| Stage 4: **Developing a Whole School Approach** – *Putting it all together*	1. Realignment of school policy with new practice 2. Managing the Transition 3. Widening the lens

Weare (2004) states that '*The call for holistic thinking is based on a growing realization across a vast range of social, health and educational challenges, which is that the analyses and solutions that work in practice are usually holistic ones.*' P. 53. Weare suggests that a number of recent large scale systematic reviews have '…*concluded unequivocally that whole-school approaches are essential when attempting to tackle*

emotional and social issues in schools'. See (Lister-Sharpe et al., 2000; Catalano et al., 2002; Wells, Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2003)

1. Realignment of school policy with new practice

Based on this conventional wisdom and linking this to what we know about culture change we have developed a model to describe how the realignment of school behaviour management policy might occur. It is our firm belief that policy development cannot happen in isolation and must take into consideration the imperatives of the system and the school needs, together with the philosophy underpinning restorative practice. There is also a risk that if the review process relies on current thinking (that may have its origins in a traditional punitive approach) that has not been challenged, there will be ongoing conflict between practice and policy. It is also why the review of the behaviour management policy should not occur until new practices and structures have been established through a process of experimentation to develop a hierarchy of responses based on best practice. All four components are crucial contributors to the review and realignment of behaviour management policy.

Figure 3:Developing a Whole School Approach
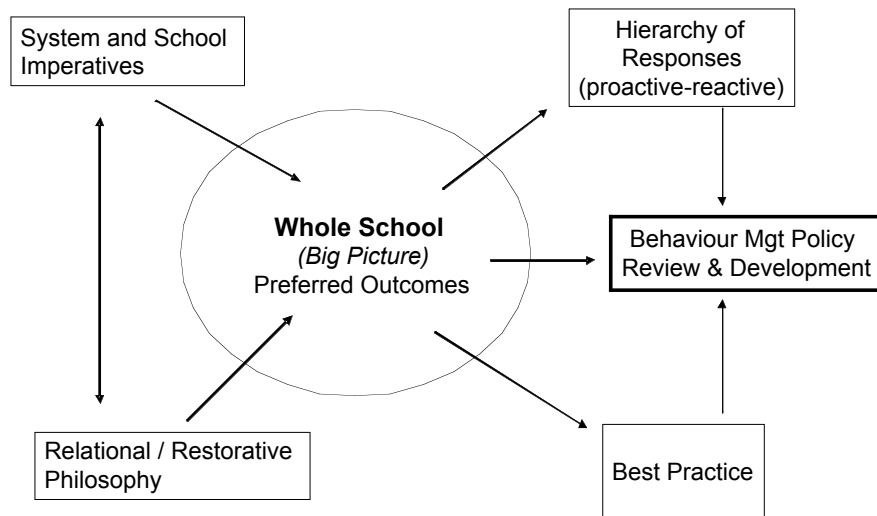
2. Managing the Transition

Again it is important to understand that there are inevitable tensions which arise in the transition from a traditional to a restorative approach, which require a long term strategic approach (See Table 2: Timeframe and Indicators of Change). To manage these tensions we offer the following suggestions:

- Identify core group to lead the implementation
- Keep up the dialogue
- Understand that the tensions cause strong emotional responses which must not be ignored, but rather understood
- Take a long term strategic approach (3-5 years)
- Work first with interested staff
- Leave old structures/processes in place in parallel while developing new ones
- Involve as many staff as possible in restorative processes
- Explain decisions
- Use a restorative approach for staff matters
- Walk the talk and hold steady in the face of criticism
- Share improvements in data
- Share the stories (butterflies and bullfrogs)
- Participate in professional forums and networks

It can be reassuring in the process of change to identify some of the milestones towards preferred outcomes in the short, medium and long term. Table 2 below lists some of the indicators of change and an approximate timeframe in which these might be observed. It is not intended as a prescriptive list as schools have different priorities and progress at differing rates.

12-18 months	Gaining Commitment. Changing dialogue. Pockets of practice. Improved statistics. Increased options for managing behaviour.
12-24 months	Altered dialogue & processes. Alignment of policy & procedure. Increased skill development. School community commitment.
24- 36 months	Embedding of practice at all levels. Altered operating framework. Reviewing policy and procedure. Creative solutions emerge.
4-5	Best Practice. Behaviour change embedded. Cultural change across school community.

Table 2: Timeframe & Indicators of Change

3. **Widening the lens -** many school initiatives are student focused and fail to involve the wider school community. By thinking more broadly within a whole school approach it becomes possible to see where else restorative philosophy can be applied, by broadening the conversations to include and wider school and local community.

For example:

- ❖ A Catholic primary school in Sydney has developed restorative parenting workshops in tandem with student conflict resolution programs based on restorative practices.
- ❖ Peer mediator process skills in some schools are enhanced with restorative language and practice
- ❖ Schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) have conducted a number of combined student, teacher, parent and community forums to introduce the concepts and impact of restorative practices in their school from their varying perspectives
- ❖ Several high schools in New Zealand, Queensland and the ACT have appointed staff to positions as coordinators of restorative practice with roles that include facilitation of conferences, supervision, evaluation of restorative processes, data collection, and networking with other schools
- ❖ A private boarding school for girls in regional Queensland has now trained boarding staff to deal specifically with its particular issues and conflicts which arise in the boarding school
- ❖ A high school in NZ has developed a community based partnership with a local health service to develop a program for dealing with drug related issues restoratively and with a focus on rehabilitation
- ❖ A high school in Tasmania which had ongoing problems with student alcohol consumption involved the local hotel and liquor outlet in a partnership agreement, based on a better understanding of the impact on relationships between the school and the local hotel and their mutual frustrations
- ❖ Similarly, agreements have been reached with local bus companies regarding the management of student behaviour on school buses and the behaviours of drivers
- ❖ Some schools are developing healthier working relationships with local agencies such as police and family services based on relational principles and ongoing dialogue to better meet both their operational and philosophical needs

All four stages will be limited in their effectiveness unless there is a concerted effort to develop professional relationships within the school community, particularly at a staff level. As stated earlier in this paper, the following stage operates alongside all other stages of implementation.

Stage 5: **Professional Relationships –** *Walking the talk with each other*	1. Promoting open, honest, transparent and fair working relationships 2. Using restorative processes for managing staff grievance, performance management and conflict 3. Challenging practice and behaviour – building integrity

Changing the hearts and mindsets of staff can be the greatest challenge for culture change. There has been a tendency to avoid self reflection and a willingness to change by suggesting that *it is all too hard* and to blame teachers for implementation failure. Lingard et al. (2002) capture this in relation to student learning outcomes: '*We caution against blaming teachers because there are obvious structural reasons for the apparent lack of productive pedagogies in many of the classrooms observed. ...while changes are required in pedagogies, so are complementary modifications to school and systemic structures, and support for teachers' professional learning communities.*'p.33.

It is this notion of professional learning communities that warrants further discussion in this stage of reform. How can restorative practices assist in the development of professional learning communities? How do we expand the field of influence a teacher has beyond their classroom or their domain? What are the unwritten ground rules in the staff room and the way messages (both real and symbolic) are communicated within the school?

Schools that are building sustainable practice have some common themes in terms of their professional relationships. They:

1. Promote openness, honesty, transparency and fairness in their dealing with each other
2. Use restorative processes for managing staff grievances, performance management and conflict
3. Challenge practice and behaviour with a supportive approach
4. Take care to engage whole staff and wider school community
5. Core leadership team leading the implementation process *walk the talk* with the understanding that their behaviour sends strong messages to the rest of the school community

It needs to be recognised that staff and managers are people who are not always perfect, will make mistakes and need guidance and encouragement. Sometimes staff will be aggrieved by the behaviours of students or colleagues. At other times they need to be accountable for their own behaviours which may have had a negative impact on other members of the school community. If we are to develop a professional working environment, it too must be underpinned by restorative philosophy and practice. This would be reflected in the day to day structures, communications and processes staff engage in.

Conclusion

If we are to heed the lessons of the past decade of pioneering work in schools, then we must approach the implementation of restorative practices with a broad and deep understanding of what makes a difference. It is not simply a case of overlaying a justice model of conferencing and expecting it to work in a school setting. Restorative practice in schools is much more than conferencing serious misconduct. We are working in a

community that has long term and deep relationships between all its members who need to co-exist in a healthy way for learning outcomes to be met. This requires a range of proactive and responsive processes which strengthen relationships and take a relational approach to problem solving. The implementation of restorative practice risks the fate of many other well intentioned programs unless we understand what it takes to change the hearts and minds of our school communities and are prepared to learn from our past.

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