Classroom Discipline Kiwi Style: School-based Restorative Justice Programs at Three New Zealand Schools

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Restorative justice is based upon the theory that crime or harm done by an individual impacts other individuals and the community more than it does the state. The response suggested by restorative justice involves repairing the harm done, involving all stakeholders, developing relationships, and eventually attempting to transform both individuals and communities. Restorative justice can be especially applicable in the school system. A school-based restorative process attempts to address student behavior in a manner that will enable the student to remain in school and learn from his or her actions. This involves methods that emphasize the development of relationships and trust within the school more so then zero-tolerance policies and punitive discipline.

Margaret Thorsborne is the creator of the first school based restorative justice program in Australia, one of the leading scholars on restorative justice, and an administrator of restorative training based on her model for school staff worldwide. According to Thorsborne, restorative justice in the school setting "views misconduct not as school-rule breaking behavior…but as a violation against people and relationships in the school and the wider school community".[i] The main goal of the restorative process is repairing these relationships and strengthening the community.

While school-based restorative justice can take many different forms, the standard model in response to an incident involves a conference led by a trained facilitator, the student in question, and others involved. This could include fellow students, teachers, deans or principals, and family members. The conference is designed to allow everyone a chance to speak, and the group collectively decides upon the outcome and future course of action for those involved in the incident. Other aspects of a school-based restorative justice program could include a restorative thinking room for more minor incidents, and a full-class restorative conference for issues involving many students.

School-based restorative justice is beginning to catch on in the United States. The Denver public school system recently had restorative practices written into their disciplinary code, and each school in the system utilizes a restorative program with success.[ii] Other cities, such as Philadelphia, Minnesota, and Portland, have also started exploring school-based restorative justice.[iii] However, the movement is still in its early stages, and few schools have had programs long enough to be able to judge their impact. Additionally, Thorsborne says that it takes five years for a restorative justice program to reach its full potential and create a "culture change" in the school.[iv]

To learn more about school-based restorative justice and its potential for schools in the United States, I visited and conducted research at three schools in New Zealand with restorative justice programs. While the restorative justice programs are different at each school and have been around for varying amounts of time, each school based their program on Thorsborne's model and had key members undergo Thorsborne's training. My research is based upon interviews, observations, and statistics, and attempts to paint both a qualitative and quantitative picture of the restorative justice programs at each of the three schools: Massey High School in Auckland, Opotiki College in Opotiki, and Manawatu College in Foxton (in New Zealand, a "college" is the equivalent of an American high school). For each school, I will initially discuss the process by which the program came about and the structure of the current program, and then describe the qualitative and quantitative effects the program has had on the school.

Massey High School (pages 3-16)

Massey High School is located in west Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand. As of May 2010, Massey had a student population of 2,426, making it larger then most schools in the area.[v] It is a very diverse school, with 42% European students, 22% Maori (or indigenous), 20% Pacific Islander, and 13% Asian.[vi] Massey has a decile score of five out of ten (ten being the highest), a scale that takes in a range of social factors including socioeconomic background and employment status[vii]. However, the decile score isn't representative of the average student at Massey. According to Dean

Chris Farrington, Massey's students have varying backgrounds, with some coming from very affluent families and others coming from families and neighborhoods that are some of the poorest in Auckland.[viii]

Background of Restorative Justice at Massey

Massey first started down the restorative path in 2002. According to Jude Moxon, a Resource Teacher of Learning and Behavior (RTLB) and the described "leader" of restorative justice at Massey, the school had been suffering high rates of suspensions and expulsions and was looking for alternative methods.[ix] The restorative movement began when Stewart Newby, the Head of Student Support Services at Massey, attended a conference in Australia run by Margaret Thorsborne.[x] Newby was impressed by Thorsborne's model for school-based restorative justice, and relayed the ideas to Massey principal Bruce Ritchie. Ritchie was familiar with the concept of restorative justice, and recognized the potential of such a model at Massey.[xi] Soon after, Thorsborne came to Massey and gave a three-day restorative training session to the majority of the staff members (including Ritchie and all of the deans). Massey started its restorative program the following school year, and modeled most of the program on Thorsborne's ideas.

The decision for Massey to shift to restorative practices was made in part due to perceived inadequacies of the punitive model that Massey had previously employed. According to Ritchie, the punitive model of punishment, in which there are set disciplinary responses for each incident with little consideration given to the specific student or circumstance, may have some value as a deterrent.[xii] However, he also believes that it suppresses social interaction and "doesn't necessarily change people's behavior."[xiii] Ritchie explained that Massey used to have a "withdraw room" where disruptive students were sent to do work and possibly be sanctioned, and then eventually sent back to class. But there were no restorative aspects to the room, and Richie says little progress was made in modifying student behavior. In contrast, Ritchie believes that restorative justice, and the Restorative Thinking Program (RPT) (the new version of the withdraw room), has "the potential to change people's behavior and thinking".[xiv] While Massey still has punitive discipline for certain cases, Ritchie says that the number of suspensions administered has decreased due, in part, to restorative justice giving the school "other options" in dealing with students.[xv]

Newby and Moxon also saw the punitive system as lacking important aspects that the restorative justice (RJ) model addresses. Newby said that prior to the restorative justice program, it was common to hear kids responding to the standardized disciplinary system by saying things like "this is not fair".[xvi] Newby said that he never hears that anymore, because the restorative process caters to the specifics of the incident and ensures that all aspects of the situation are considered. Newby believes that this shift is extremely beneficial. He says that adolescents "have a real exaggerated sense of what's right and what's wrong," and "through RJ, [students] know that they have been heard and given the best shot possible."[xvii]

For Moxon, the shift to restorative justice was important in fostering relationships between all members of the school community. In a traditional punitive disciplinary system, the emphasis is placed on punishment and deterrence rather then relationships and trust. According to Moxon, restorative justice was an opportunity for Massey to switch emphasis to the latter, enabling the school to support students and solve issues and problems more productively.[xviii] Moxon says the school believed that, "by getting students and teachers listening and talking together, they [could] solve a lot of the issues themselves", and that the development of relationships would "enhance learning as well."[xix] Moxon was aware that the strengthening of relationships would take time and necessitate a "culture change" within the school, but was confident that Massey would be a better place because of it.[xx]

Current Restorative Justice Structure

The current structure of the restorative justice program at Massey high school is multifaceted and involves both reactive and proactive processes. The reactive structure is designed to address incidents that have resulted in some harm, while the proactive structure uses incremental steps to achieve the long-term goal of school-wide "culture change" and prevent harmful incidents in the first place. While the two types of processes are interrelated—for example, a reactive restorative action is also proactive in a sense because it lays the foundation for preventing harmful incidents in the future—I will separate them in this report.

- *Reactive Restorative Processes*

The Restorative Thinking Programme (RPT)

The foundation of the reactive restorative process is the Restorative Thinking Programme, or RPT. When a student is being disruptive in class (speaking out of turn, not following directions, ect.) and the teacher finds that a brief restorative conversation or behavioral re-think sheet (both discussed in more detail later) aren't sufficient, then the student can be sent to the RPT room to meet with student support staff. (RPT is only for 9th and 10th years, 11th-13th years can be sent out to undergo the same process but do so without the supervision of student support staff). In the RPT room, students talk through the incident with a staff member, who has received an explanation from the teacher for why the student was sent out of class, and fill out a form concerning the incident. This form, which is entitled a "Restorative Thinking Plan," includes analysis of what the incident was, how it affected others, a goal for the future and plan to achieve it, and how the teacher of the class could help the student achieve it. When the student returns to class, either during the same period or the following day, the teacher is given a copy of the plan and discusses it with the student. After three RTP referrals, a student support staff member phones the parents of the student to touch base and seek their help; upon the fourth referral students are referred to the dean for a daily report and are assigned to a support person; and upon the seventh referral the staff considers either a full restorative meeting or a suspension depending on the circumstances.[xxi]

Melissa Castle, a PE teacher at Massey and a member of the RPT staff for the past four years, finds that the students sent to the RPT room are experiencing a range of emotions.[xxii] Castle has developed methods for addressing these emotions and getting the student to constructively think about the incident that sent them there. In most cases, Castle initially tries to connect with the student on a personal level, including asking about their home life and family, in order to learn about the student, get their mind off of the incident, and calm them down. However, in cases when the student is overwhelmed by their emotions and unable to think, Castle leaves the student alone with the RTP sheet for a short period of time. Castle has found that giving the student some space helps them "realize that they are safe, that they are able to chill and be comfortable", and when she returns to the room the student is usually calm and "ok to work with".[xxiii] Techniques such as the ones Castle has developed illustrate the flexible nature of restorative justice in finding methods for connecting with individuals and prompting changes in behavior, and are part of the reason why Ritchie believes that the RPT room has been a successful alternative to the withdraw room.

Classroom Conferencing

In instances when classroom disruptions are a regular occurrence and come from multiple students, a teacher can request a full class restorative conference. A class restorative conference is a multi-part process. On the first day, Moxon and a dean of the school speak to the students without any teachers present. Moxon explains the restorative process and theory to the students, emphasizes that nobody is in trouble and going to be blamed or named, and has each student write down what

they observe to be the problems in class and what they can do personally to make the class a better place. Then, Moxon gathers the class in a circle so each student can share what they wrote.

The following day, Moxon and the dean meet with the class again, but this time with all of the teachers of the students present (at Massey, core classes consist of the same group of students, so multiple teachers have them and are affected by their behavior). The group forms a large circle and everyone gets a chance to speak. At the end, Moxon compiles a list of things that the group said they were going to work on (talk less in class, respect the teacher, ect.) and posts it in each classroom the students have together. Moxon stays in touch with the teachers to monitor how the students responded to the restorative conference, and follows up with the class if necessary. When the class is perceived to have achieved their goals, they are rewarded with a celebration with pizza, ice cream, or another treat.

While it can be difficult for students to speak about these issues in front of so many people, Moxon believes that it is essential in order to bring about change.[xxiv] In the classroom conference that I witnessed, the class was initially loud and rambunctious when we walked in the room on the first day. Paper airplanes whizzed across the room and groups of students giggled together in corners. It was obvious why several teachers were having issues with this particular class. During the restorative process, it was fascinating to watch each student in turn open up about difficult issues and to witness their transformation which occurred by the end of the second day. One student, who at first sight had been one of the leading troublemakers in the class, was nearly reduced to tears on the second day while apologizing to the class and his teachers for his disrespectful behavior. While the change in the class from one day to the next certainly doesn't guarantee a complete shift for the rest of the year, Moxon left this particular classroom conference confident that the class would see significant improvement.

According to Moxon, classroom restoratives are successful in large part because it involves every student in the class and not just those that are causing the problems.[xxv] Moxon says that regardless of whether someone is a good student or a disruptive student, they "all have a part to play in creating the atmosphere in the classroom."[xxvi] By making every student reflect on their behavior and create personal goals, whether they are to stop disrupting the class or to help others do so, Moxon believes that "you bring about change to the climate of the classroom" and create a better learning environment for everyone.[xxvii]

This philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of community and positive peer engagement, is manifested through the creation of a student committee if a class is struggling to meet its goals following a restorative conference. Students are selected by their peers based upon their ability to be leaders and have a positive influence on the class in encouraging others to follow through with the commitments made during the classroom conference. Moxon meets with the student committee to check up on the progress of the class and generally finds the committees helpful, saying, "we've had a lot of success with [student committees] in helping to keep the positive feeling that was created out of the class conference."[xxviii] The student committees illustrate that restorative influence doesn't have to be limited to people in positions of authority and can be nurtured in everyday peer-to-peer interactions.

Individual Restorative Conferences

Harmful incidents or conflicts that are deemed to be serious by the dean result in a restorative conference with the individuals involved. There are two types of individual conferences: the mini conference, and the "Full Monty" or full restorative conference. Mini conferences are for incidents that the dean believes are not serious enough to involve parents, such as a verbal spat between two students. Mini conferences can also be held at the request of a student who is experiencing some

harm. In a mini conference, all of the individuals directly involved in the incident (whether students, teachers, or other staff), are led through a restorative process by a neutral facilitator in which all parties share their side of the story and reach an agreement to repair the harm and prevent future incidents from occurring.[xxix] The exact nature of each conference varies each time depending on the incident and those involved. For each conference, however, the facilitator uses a seating chart for the circle, as well as a speaking order for those involved, based upon Thorsborne's model.

If a student undergoes several mini conferences without signs of changing their behavior, or if the initial incident is serious enough that the deans believe parents should be involved (such as a physical altercation), then they hold a "Full Monty" or full restorative conference. A "Full Monty" conference is structured similarly to the mini conference, differing in that the students are given an introduction to the conference the day before, and the families (or other support people) of all students involved, as well as a senior manager of the school, are present and able to voice their opinions.[xxx] If a student is involved in an incident that the dean believes is worthy of a Full Monty conference, and the student or all of their family members or support people refuse to partake in the restorative process, the student receives a traditional punitive punishment. A student also can receive a punitive punishment for an extremely serious offense such as drug-dealing or bringing a weapon to school; if the board of trustees decides that the student is to eventually be let back into the school, they must undergo a restorative conference concerning the incident.

The individual restorative conferences are designed to benefit the perpetrator of the incident by giving them the chance to learn from their mistakes and change their behavior while spending little, if any, time outside of the classroom. However, Moxon believes that the conferences are also beneficial to the victim of the incident by serving as a supportive healing process. When incidents are handled with punitive punishment, Moxon says that the victim of the incident doesn't experience any healing, because the victims are "removed from the process" and "there is no face to face interaction and remorse shown."[xxxi] On the other hand, Moxon usually finds the restorative conferences to be healing for the victim through the simple nature of "human beings being together and telling their story and understanding how whatever happened came to be."[xxxii] Moxon says that, "nothing heals like empathy, and if the victim is shown empathy by the wrongdoer then that is extremely healing."[xxxiii] The restorative conference thus functions as a healing and supportive process for both the victim and the perpetrator, a process reinforced by consequences that are decided upon by the people in the meeting with the vested interest in the situation.

- *Proactive Restorative Processes*

Restorative Language and Conversation

While restorative processes are most noticeable in the form of reactive processes to incidents, proactive restorative practices are part of everyday school practice at Massey through restorative language and conversations. Teachers are encouraged to connect with students and relate to them on a personal level. When a student is causing a disturbance in class, teachers are encouraged to have a "restorative chat" with the student based upon a booklet created by Moxon and Margaret Thorsborne. This "chat" includes asking questions such as: "what happened?", "what were you thinking at the time?", "who do you think is being affected?", and "how can we make sure this doesn't happen again?".[xxxiv] In instances where a teacher only has a short period of time to talk to the student, they are instructed to make a brief statement about how the student's behavior affects them personally, drawing upon the connection to the student they have developed. Staff members are also encouraged to use restorative language and conversation when interacting with other staff (restorative conferencing has also been utilized for conflicts between two staff members).

Ritchie says he has seen firsthand the use of restorative conversation and language as a proactive approach at Massey. He says that restorative practices at Massey "don't just come as the result of an incident", and that "teachers are using restorative methods in their conversations with students all the time."[xxxv] According to Ritchie, restorative practices have the potential to change the culture of a school and "really go through the whole organization."[xxxvi] He believes that restorative language and conversation are an essential part of what makes Massey a "restorative school" which works to not only address harmful incidents in a productive way but also to prevent them in the first place.[xxxvii]

Restorative language and conversation at Massey is reinforced through periodic staff trainings and workshops. Thorsborne has administered trainings for all Massey staff several times, which include the importance of restorative language and conversation (she is scheduled to give another training later this year). Furthermore, Moxon, Castle, and other student support staff run workshops each year during staff performance development hours to expand on Thorsborne's teachings. In the workshops, Moxon, Castle, and the other staff focus on the importance of connection, introspection, clearing (of emotional baggage), relational statements, and restorative questioning in dealing with students, which can allow class to run smoothly and prevent small incidents from escalating.[xxxviii] Ritchie says that these workshops, as well as Thorsborne's periodic trainings, function both to refresh the memory of staff members who have undergone the process before, and to educate new staff members who aren't familiar with the restorative process and the importance of proactive measures.[xxxix]

Other Related Programs at Massey

There are several other programs at Massey that, while not specifically related to restorative justice, emphasize similar themes and function proactively to prevent harmful incidents and enhance academic success. "Tekotahitanga" is a program focused on raising achievement of Maori students at Massey through the development of relationships and teacher pedagogy. Teachers at Massey are trained to teach classes with Maori students in them in a way that emphasizes cooperation and is more conducive to Maori culture. The program follows up on the training with classroom observation, feedback for teachers, and co-construction meetings where teachers reflect on their experiences with one another.

Massey also has an Academic Counseling program which focuses specifically on improving academic achievement for all students. The program uses goal setting through individualized learning plans to give students a greater sense of purpose and responsibility in their learning. Both the Tekotahitanga and Academic Counseling programs were started at Massey shortly after the restorative justice program (Tekotahitanga in 2003, Academic Counseling in 2007), and Ritchie says that momentum gained from restorative justice was helpful in adopting other programs that share a similar mindset.[xl] According to Ritchie, the programs are all interrelated and "compliment one another", because restorative justice and Tekotahitanga emphasize relationships and engagement and "you can't get academic achievement if the students aren't engaged".[xli]

The major minority groups represented at Massey, Maori and Pacific Islander, are further supported by social workers that deal specifically with reducing suspensions and enhancing achievement of those groups. There is one staff member who is a support person for Maori males, one for Mauri females, and one for Pacific Islander students. Students are referred to these social workers when they exhibit early signs of needing extra support, whether for disciplinary or academic reasons, and the social workers develop relationships with the students and can help them in a variety of ways. The social workers get to know the students and can discuss incidents with them, organize meetings with the student's family either at school or at the student's home, talk to the

student's teachers about how to best work with the student, and be present and help students through the restorative justice process should a student become involved in it.

John Copeland, the Maori male support person at Massey who has worked at the school for ten years, say he has never seen another group of school-based social workers like the one at Massey and believes that it is extremely beneficial for the students.[xlii] He emphasizes the importance of being able to connect with the family of the student's and working with them to help the student. Copeland says, "if we can keep [the family] informed of things that are happening at school, the family can do something about it and vice versa. By getting everyone involved, you can support the student and empower them to take responsibility."[xliii] Copeland has a long background with restorative justice—he helped facilitate family group conferences in the juvenile justice system following a legislative act in 1989 which was the precursor to school-based restorative justice—and he says that the restorative process is "engrained in the work and always on the mind" of himself and his colleagues.[xliv] Copeland, who is of Maori decent, believes that his race helps him connect with students by making it easier for them to relate to him on a cultural level (the other social workers are also of the same race as the students they work with). The work of Copeland and his colleagues, as well as the Tekotahitanga and Academic Counseling programs, provide a strong, proactive student support network at Massey that uses restorative methods.

Outcomes of the Restorative Justice Program

The restorative justice program at Massey has had a significant impact on the school. In 2007, Massey dean Chris Farrington put together a report measuring the impact of the restorative justice program on "stand-downs" (similar to suspensions in the US, force students to stay at home for 1-5 days), "suspensions" (require the student to stay home until they appear before the board of trustees, usually about a week to 10 days), academic achievement, and literacy rates.[xlv] While the number of stand-downs per 1,000 students at Massey rose from 100 to 120 between 2002-2007, the rate of suspensions per 1,000 fell from 32 to 14.[xlvi] In other words, while stand-downs rose by about 20%, suspensions decreased by more then 50%. The average high school in Auckland experienced a similar increase in the rate of stand-downs during this time period, but saw no decrease in the rate of suspensions, meaning that Massey's decrease in suspension was against the norm. [xlvii]

According to Farrington, the data indicates that while incidents are continuing to occur, recidivism and serious offenses that mandate a suspension have greatly decreased.[xlviii] Moxon also points out that the stand-down rate is somewhat misleading because students are often stood down for a short period of time in preparation for their restorative conference.[xlix] This means that some incidents that in the past that would have resulted in a suspension are now handled using a stand down and restorative conference.

The data also indicates that introduction of the restorative justice program coincided with an improvement in academic achievement at Massey. In 2003, only 32.9% of Massey 11th year students met the "level 1" national standard of achievement, compared to 52.5% of 11th year students nation-wide.[l] By 2006, however, the percent at Massey had risen to 56.9%, much closer to the national average of 59.0%.[li] In other words, over three years Massey experienced a raise of 26.0% in level 1 achievement for 11th years. Massey experienced a similarly large improvement in literacy rates during this time. In 2003, 51.6% of 11th year students at Massey met the national standard of literacy (compared to 71.6% of 11th years nation-wide).[lii] In 2006, Massey's literacy rate was at 71.3%, an increase of 19.7% (the national average in 2006 was 75.8%).[liii]

Farrington and Moxon are quick to point out that the significant increase in academic achievement at Massey from 2003-2006 is not solely due to the restorative justice program, citing Tekotahitanga and other factors as playing a role. However, both also emphasize that restorative

justice certainly had *something* to do with it, a reasonable conclusion considering the stark improvements in achievement came immediately after the implementation of the restorative justice program. Moxon believes that the improvement in academic achievement at Massey should reassure schools that the commitment of time, money, and energy to restorative justice pays back in more ways then just reducing suspensions and expulsions.

While the statistics illustrate the positive effect of restorative justice at Massey, the consensus at the school is that the impact of the restorative justice program goes far beyond the statistics. Every staff member I talked to was adamant that ever since the restorative justice program was instituted, Massey has undergone a "culture change." According to Moxon, this "culture change" is present in all aspects of the school, and includes a "greater emphasis on relationships and trust" and a more holistic view of students that brings an understanding that "you have to persevere through the rocky times with kids and figure out a way to get them connected to the school."[liv] Moxon and others believe that, over time, most of the staff members at the school have bought into the restorative process.

According to Newby, there has been almost too much teacher buy-in. He says that teachers now commonly run their own restorative conferences without telling the student support staff, which can make it difficult to evaluate and record them.[lv] However, Newby is overwhelmingly pleased by what he calls the restorative "movement", saying that most teachers at Massey see restorative practices as "naturally just part of their job" and that "when you try to control things such as restorative justice, it loses its impetus."[lvi] Students have also noticed the "culture change" at Massey. In a 2007 Massey report on the schools' restorative justice program, students were quoted as saying that due to restorative justice, they now "feel calm in class" and "make friends with other people even if you don't know them."[lvii]

Opotiki College (16-28)

Opotiki College is in the small town of Opotiki in the Bay of Plenty, located on the eastern shore of the Northern Island. Opotiki is much smaller then Massey, with a 2010 enrollment of 520 students.[lviii] The majority (79.0%) of the students are Maori, while European students represent 17.0% and Asian and Pacific students make up the other 4.0%.[lix] The town of Opotiki is extremely impoverished. According to Principal Maurie Abraham, Opotiki is the most deprived region in New Zealand. This is reflected in Opotiki's decile score of 1, which is the lowest possible score on the scale out of 10. It is also shown in the academic standing of students entering Opotiki, who have disproportionately low academic test scores. In 2010, approximately 65% of 9th years entering Opotiki scored in the bottom 25% in a national academic test called MidYIS, and 90% of 9th years scored in the bottom 50% of the test.[lx]

Background of Restorative Justice at Opotiki

Not long ago, Opotiki's extremely high rates of suspensions and expulsions garnered negative national attention. A 2002 New Zealand newspaper article named Opotiki "New Zealand's most punitive school" and stated that Opotiki had suspended 11% of its students the previous year, a rate ten times higher then the national average.[lxi] Most of the disciplinary issues at Opotiki were related to drug use (mainly marijuana), as the Bay of Plenty is known as the marijuana capital of New Zealand. Despite the high rates of drug offenses, Opotiki College took an extremely harsh stance on marijuana use. Prior to 2003, any student involved with marijuana received in an automatic suspension. On average, Opotiki had between 50-60 total suspensions and around 10 total expulsions

a year during those years.[lxii] According to current principal Maurie Abraham, approximately 90% of the suspensions and 95% of the expulsions were for issues related to marijuana use.[lxiii]

When Abraham became principal in 2003, he was determined to do something about the high suspension rate. He immediately changed the disciplinary policy so that first time drug offenders received a stand-down rather then a suspension. This resulted in a sharp decrease in suspensions. From 2003-2005, suspensions dropped to between 10-20 a year.[lxiv] Abraham found, however, that merely changing the policy wasn't changing student behavior, and that approximately the same number of students each year were becoming involved with marijuana. He says that this made him feel "powerless," because he felt his methods were just a "reaction to the inevitable, continued drug use."[lxv] For this reason, he kept his ears open for other potential changes he could make.

He would find inspiration from other schools facing similar issues. In September of 2005, Abraham and deputy principal Robyn Abraham-Harris attended a presentation in New Plymouth by a school that was utilizing a new drug program, and a presentation in Bream Bay by a school that had just started using a restorative justice program. Intrigued by the presentation, Abraham and Abraham-Harris began contemplating similar changes for Opotki. Abraham-Harris says that after the conference, she and Abraham "started talking really strongly about how [a restorative program] was a journey we needed to start taking because we felt we just needed a complete re-look at our discipline system."[lxvi]

Later that month, members from an Opotiki girl's netball team were caught drinking during an overnight stay. Abraham and Abraham-Harris thought it was a perfect opportunity to try a restorative approach instead of merely suspending the girls as they would have done in the past. They organized a restorative conference (known at Opotiki as a restorative "hui", which means "meeting") with the six students involved, their families, and police officers. The conference went smoothly and was very successful. Abraham says that he immediately realized that the restorative conference was "powerful stuff," and that "if it worked for this one, it should work for anything."[lxvii] At that point, Abraham fully committed to using a restorative approach to all top-end incidents, and began working to "drag the [restorative processes] down through the lower level" incidents.[lxviii]

The next year, Abraham and his other deputy principal, Lea Vellenoweth, attended Margaret Thorsborne's three-day restorative training, getting funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Education who made the training free to Opotiki and other schools with low decile scores. Abraham says that Opotiki was already using Thorsborne's basic restorative model as gleaned from Bream Bay's presentation, but that the training was helpful in broadening their understanding of restorative justice and refining their system.[lxix] The following year, most of the deans at Opotiki attended the same training, and each year since Thorsborne has come directly to Opotiki to train portions of the staff. Abraham stressed the importance of the training, but also emphasized he was glad that Opotiki went ahead with its restorative program before most of the staff was formally trained. Abraham-Harris agreed, saying that initially, they didn't "have a clear picture in mind about the program" but realized that they "had to get going on this as soon as possible."[lxx] Over time, with help from Thorsborne, Abraham-Harris says that Opotiki developed "a much clear[er] picture of what we wanted the restorative justice program to look like" and a restorative "ethos" underpinning the school.[lxxi]

Current Restorative Justice Structure

Like Massey, Opotiki has both reactive and proactive restorative processes, many of which are similar to Massey's. Reactively, Opotiki utilizes restorative classroom conferencing in much the same way as Massey, with a neutral facilitator following Thorsborne's model. Proactively, Opotiki is also similar to Massey in that it emphasizes the use of restorative language and conversation in

everyday classroom settings. If a student isn't following directions in class and is a distraction, teachers are instructed to go through a three-step restorative process: Relaxed Vigilance (brief, generally non-verbal reminders of expectations), Slightly Less Relaxed Vigilance (verbal messages that can include I-statements), and finally a Mini Chat with the student based upon the same question booklet used by Massey.[lxxii] Opotiki also has employed the Tekotahitanga program aimed at raising Maori achievement with success for four years, and has several student support staff that have been trained in restorative justice and use it in their interactions with students.

There are aspects of Opotiki's restorative justice program, however, that differ from Massey's and have been developed to address the specific needs of the school. While the basic idea of these processes is often similar to Massey's, Opotiki implements them in a different manner. I will now explore these areas of Opotiki's restorative justice program.

Ruma Whakaaro

When a students is misbehaving in class, and the teacher has exhausted all three proactive restorative processes, then the student can be sent to the Ruma Whakaaro, which translates roughly to "thinking room." This process is called being "Bluied", because the teacher gives the student a blue form explaining why they were sent out of class. When a student arrives at the Ruma Whakaaro, a facilitator helps the student fill out a restorative reflection sheet, which, like the "Restorative Thinking Plan" at Massey, includes a plan for how the student is to change their behavior in the future.

While the concept of the Ruma Whakaaro is similar to Massey's RPT room, the Ruma Whakaaro differs in several ways. A trip to the Ruma Whakaaro is treated as a more serious incident then a trip to the RPT room. Each time a student is sent to the Ruma Whakaaro, Opotiki staff sends both a letter and a phone call to the parents of the student to inform them of the incident and involve them in the process. A student that has been sent to the Ruma Whakaaro doesn't return to the class that they were sent out from until they have a "restorative hui" with a neutral facilitator and the teacher with whom they had an issue. The parents of the student are also invited to attend the restorative hui, and do so about half the time. Opotiki staff attempt to run the restorative hui 1-2 days after the student has been sent out of class, but the conferences can be difficult to schedule and a student could be kept out of class for 3-4 days.[lxxiii] During this time, the facilitator of the Ruma Whakaaro gets in touch with the teacher to get make-up work for the student to do while in the Ruma Whakaaro.

While Abraham is somewhat concerned about the fact that students in the Ruma Whakaaro can miss several days of class, he feels it is imperative that each "bluie" results in a restorative conference. He says that staff have gotten better about not sending students out of class too often, and that "if a kid's behavior gets to the point that they have to be removed, then, for me, that's a serious breakdown of the relationship."[lxxiv] In Abraham's view, the "value of the restorative approach is that when there is harm to the relationship, it is vital that you take the time and effort to repair it" by having a conference.[lxxv] He says he looked into Massey's methods but didn't think they would work at Opotiki, because he thinks it is important his students go through a conference each time to learn from their behavior. Abraham also pointed out that for each Bluie after the first, a student is required to attend school "catch up" time during lunch or after school, where they make up for some of the class time they lost.[lxxvi]

Prior to the Ruma Whakaaro and its shift to being a restorative school, Opotiki had a "withdraw" room in which students weren't forced to talk about and reflect on their behavior. According to Ruth Pirini-Hape, a year 9 dean at Opotiki and the main facilitator of the Ruma Whakaaro, you could "guarantee" that students placed in the withdraw room would "get into trouble again and be back."[lxxvii] Pirini-Hape thinks that the new restorative process is more effective at changing student

behavior and reducing recidivism. In 2009, more then half of the students who received "Bluies" received only one the whole year and only six students received more then four "Blueies."[lxxviii] Pirini-Hape also believes that the Ruma Whakaaro provides a much more conducive atmosphere for positive change then the withdraw room, saying it is "more like a home; it makes the students feel safe and gives them a chance to think about what they've done."[lxxix]

The restorative hui's can be an opportunity for staff to talk to students about dealing with issues that are initiated outside of school. In a restorative hui that I observed, a student had been "bluied" because of misbehaving in class and writing and talking about gang activity. Both the teacher and Kellie Ponsonby, a year-10 dean who was running the conference, emphasized that there must be some separation between the classroom and outside incidents. However, when Ponsonby was alone with the student, she took the chance to ask the student a bit more about his potential gang involvement, explain the dangers, and emphasize her desire that the student stay away from gangs. While the student denied any gang involvement, he did hint that there might be some outside issues in his life and was visibly affected by the conversation. When he apologized to the teacher and promised to keep any gang activity out of the classroom, his eyes were glassy. The teacher didn't doubt that his sincerity. Ponsonby says that she only talks about personal issues with students, such as gang involvement, once she has developed a relationship with them. She says that many of the students at Opotiki have rough home lives and that in order for them to change their behavior, they need to know that "somebody believes in them and cares about them".[lxxx]

Section 27 and Restorative Conferences

If a student accumulates five "blueies", or has an incident involving drugs or violence, then they are sent home either under a "Stand-down" or "Section 27" and the school prepares a restorative conference. A "stand-down" is the more traditional punitive approach, where students are sent home for up to five days depending on the nature of the incident. In the majority of cases, however, Opotiki uses the less punitive "Section 27" clause that sends the student home until a restorative conference can be arranged, which usually takes around 1-2 days. "Section 27" is a clause that allows schools to reach an understanding with the parents of a student that the student is going to miss a certain amount of time from school. While it functions similarly to a stand-down, it doesn't show up on a student's record (or the schools traditional discipline record).

According to deputy principal Robyn Abraham-Harris, using a Section-27 is a better way to establish connection with the family. Abraham-Harris says that a Section 27 "doesn't put parents on the defensive" as much as a traditional punitive punishment, and that it "opens the lines of communication" between the family and the school because it is a more informal process.[lxxxi] Almost all current Section 27 incidents at Opotiki would, in the past, have resulted in a suspension, which entailed a longer time out of school and a hearing with the board of trustees to decide if the student was to be expelled.[lxxxii]

The restorative conference that the student undergoes before returning to school is similar to the "fully monty" conference used at Massey. The main difference between them is that Opotiki often chooses to split the conference up into two, with the initial one involving the family of the student, and the second one involving the affected teachers of the student. Abraham says that Opotiki does this for several reasons. For one, he says that many parents can be difficult to deal with and it might be detrimental to the process to have them in the same room as a teacher after an incident.[lxxxiii] Also, he says that after the parents and the student have had a conference to discuss the student's behavior, it is important for the student to "take responsibility for his or her actions" and "front up and apologize to the teachers themselves" in the following conference without their parents around.[lxxxiv] However, there are certain cases in which Abraham and other staff feel it is important for the parents

and teachers to be a part of the same meeting, and they play it by ear. Overall, Abraham says that parent involvement has gone "way up" at Opotiki due to the restorative conferences, because with suspensions in the past, parents would only get a phone call briefly explaining what had happened and weren't included much in the process.[lxxxv]

If a student is given a Section-27 or stood-down because of drug use, then, upon returning to school, they are placed in a drug counseling program which includes periodic drug tests. Abraham introduced both of these programs in an attempt to reduce future drug use by offenders.

Alternative Education

If a student accumulates six "blueies," or has gone through the restorative process several times without showing signs of changing their behavior, then they can be sent to an alternative education program, which is one block away from the school. The Alternative Education program is run by two Opotiki-funded staff members, and is a place for students to do academic work, skill-building activities, and behavior introspection. Students sent from Opotiki are generally sent for a set amount of time (usually around 2-3 weeks). After this time has elapsed, the student can either be sent back to Opotiki, remain in the Alternative Education Program, or be set up as an apprentice in the work fields of engineering, mechanics, wood work, or others, depending upon the student's and their families' preference and the behavior of the student. Specific cases may have specific requirements: for example, a student sent to the Alternative Education center because of repeated drug offences would likely have to pass a drug test in order to be re-admitted to Opotiki.

Abraham developed the current structure of the Alternative Education program, and believes that it is a valuable resource for the school. He says the program gives students who are severely alienated from school a "reality check" and a "break" from traditional school (also giving the school a "break" from the student), while generally still keeping open the option of return to school.[lxxxvi] Abraham estimates that Opotiki sends 7-8 students to the Alternative Education program for short-term placements each year, and says that, in the past, all of those students would have been suspended and most likely expelled. While Abraham says that the "occasional kid" that gets placed in the program is never able to return, there are plenty of "success stories" of students that have been through the program and are now exhibiting improved behavior in the regular high school.[lxxxvii]

Sammy (I have changed his name for purposes of the report) is one of those success stories. Sammy, who is a 10th year student, had a difficult first year at Opotiki. According to deputy principal Lea Vellenoweth, Sammy accumulated multiple "blueies" in classes for disruptions, and had repeated issues of bullying other students outside of class. Sammy himself admits that he exhibited some "bad behavior," and chuckled a bit when I asked how many times he had been involved in the restorative process.[lxxxviii]

As the result of his behavior, Sammy was sent to the Alternative Education program early in the year. After being re-admitted at Opotiki and experiencing similar problems, Sammy was sent back again at the end of last year and the beginning of this one. He was gradually reintegrated into Opotiki during a four-week span—spending half the day in one place and half at the other. Recently he completed the full transfer back to Opotiki, where his behavior has greatly improved. Deputy principal Vellenoweth says that while it took him awhile, Sammy is now "doing great at school" and is "motivated to keep good behavior so that he doesn't have to return to the Alternative program."[lxxxix] Sammy says that he is pleased to be back at school and thankful that he was able to get a second chance. He says he would recommend the Alternative Education program for other schools, so that students like him "don't get kicked out straight away and have a chance to stay in school", which he said was "better then just staying home or going to work.[xc] He thought that if you get kicked out of school at his age, you will "just be a bum or something."[xci]

Outcomes of the Restorative Justice Program

Similar to Massey, the implementation of the restorative justice program at Opotiki College has had a significant impact on the school, both from discipline and academic standpoints. While Opotiki had extremely high suspension and exclusion (or expulsion) rates as recently as 2002 (when 12 students were excluded from Opotiki), these rates have literally dropped to zero. Since Opotiki implemented the restorative justice program in 2005, they have had a grand total of 1 suspension and 0 exclusions; *Opotiki hasn't suspended or excluded a single student since 2006*.[xcii] While these statistics are masked somewhat because of Opotiki's use of Section 27 for students who might otherwise be suspended (Opotiki used Section 27 a total of 94 times in 2009 which Abraham says was a rough year; they used it 68 times in 2008)[xciii], they are still remarkable. The decrease in suspensions and expulsions is also somewhat the result of a decrease in incidents. In 2006, the number of students who committed drug offences was 22, down from an average of 53 students between 2003-2005.[xciv] Furthermore, there were only 2 students who committed repeat drug offenses in 2006, down from an average of 11.6 students between 2003-2006.[xcv] While the number of repeat offenders has varied some in the past several years, it has never been above 10.[xcvi]

The implementation of the restorative justice program at Opotiki has also coincided with an immense increase in academic achievement. In New Zealand, high school students are able to obtain three levels of qualification based upon the National Center of Education Achievement (NCEA) standards, with 1st level qualification being the easiest. In 2002, an astounding 45% of students who had been at Opotiki for four years left the school with no qualifications.[xcvii] However, that number decreased sharply in the following years. In 2007 and 2008, less then 5% of four-year students left with no qualifications, meaning they had at least achieved 1st level qualification.[xcviii] The academic improvements at Opotiki have resulted in the school performing far better academically then their decile score would indicate. In 2009, 68% of 11th years at Opotiki achieved level 1 qualification, 81% of 12th years achieved level 2 qualification, and 71% of 13th years achieved level 3 qualification.[xcix] These percentages fall within the national averages of schools with decile scores of 4-7, 8-10, and 7-9 respectively, meaning that Opotiki is performing far better then its decile score of 1 would indicate.[c] A recent newspaper article acknowledged as much and celebrated Opotiki's turn-around, listing Opotiki as a school that is "punching above its weight."[ci] While Abraham acknowledges that the restorative justice program is just one factor in the improvement in academic achievement, he says that, "I firmly believe that the restorative practices we do influence our achievement."[cii]

Again, however, the impact of the restorative justice program at Opotiki goes far beyond the statistics. Both Vellenoweth and Abraham-Harris point out that the town of Opotiki has been going through some tough times due to the recession, and the result is that students are tougher to deal with and bring more issues with them to school. They both feel that the restorative justice program has been successful in addressing these increasingly difficult student issues. Vellenoweth says that if Opotiki hadn't gone down the restorative pathway, they would "be in a pretty serious situation right now in terms of relationships with our kids and community, because some of our families are really struggling and it is reflected in student behavior."[ciii] Vellenoweth believes that the restorative justice program has helped the school gain the trust of the families, and, according to Abraham-Harris, aspects of the restorative justice program have rubbed off on the community. Abraham-Harris says that some families used to use a lot of physical discipline with their kids, but over time, as they observed the schools' methods, they started doing things differently.[civ] She says that "we used to have to tell the parents to not go home and hit their kids," but now kids say that it "isn't an issue anymore."[cv]

Changes have also been prevalent in the behavior of teachers and students. According to Abraham-Harris, teachers at Opotiki only used to run the restorative processes because they had too, but over time they have bought into the restorative program after seeing firsthand that it works. Now, she says there are "much better relationships between staff and students" than when she started working at Opotiki 15 years ago.[cvi] She recently talked to a new student at Opotiki, who was pleasantly surprised that teachers here "talk to you and are interested in you", unlike teachers at his previous school.[cvii] Vellenoweth cites a similar transformation among student behavior. She says that initially, students rejected the restorative process and merely "said what they thought they were supposed to say."[cviii] Now, more students understand that the process is meant to help them. She says that the restorative process becomes "ingrained" in students because they "know that they will be heard and they are going to get a chance to fix things up."[cix] While year 9 students at Opotiki each year are new to the restorative process and often struggle with it, Vellenoweth says that by year 10 most students adjust their feelings towards it.

Manawatu College (28-33)

Manawatu College is located in the small town of Foxton on the western shore of the North Island. Manawatu is about the same size as Opotiki, with a 2010 enrollment of 406 students.[cx] Manawatu's students are 49.0% European, 44.8% Maori, 2.5% Asian, and 3.7% other.[cxi] Manawatu has a decile score of 2, putting it slightly above Opotiki but still in the bottom 20% of all schools in New Zealand.[cxii] Foxton is a fairly rural area, and many students come from farming families.

Background of Restorative Justice at Manawatu

According to Waynne Napier, a deputy principal and the head of discipline at Manawatu, the school has long placed an emphasis on developing relationships between students and staff and has a strong structure of pastoral care. However, Manawatu relied upon a punitive system of discipline for students, and had high rates of stand-downs and suspensions. Napier says that these rates were concerning to the school, because although he thought the school genuinely cared about its students and had good support systems in place, he thought that the "exclusion of students from school was contrary to their greatest needs: socialization and learning."[cxiii] Steve Parrant, an assistant to the principal and the head of pastoral care at Manawatu, says that the punitive system made him feel that the spent "half [his] job supporting kids and half [his] job punishing them" and came across "the same kids doing the same things over and over."[cxiv] Napier and Parrant came to the conclusion that there had to be a better way of dealing with conflict, and began searching for alternative ideas.

At the end of 2007, Napier and school principal Bruce McIntyre attended a conference in Wellington about a program called Effective Behavior Support (EBS). The program focuses on the building of relationships to help students improve behavior, and prevent harmful incidents from occurring. Napier and McIntyre quickly moved to adopt a similar program at Manawatu, and created a steering group for the program, a staff action group, and a student action group (in order to ensure that students were involved throughout the process). In early 2008, Napier attended Margaret Thorsborne's training—first the one-day training, then the three-day training—and thought that restorative justice "dovetailed perfectly" into the EBS program.[cxv] Napier realized that since both programs emphasized relationships, they would work as a compliment to one another: EBS working proactively to avoid harmful incidents, and restorative justice dealing with incidents that do occur in a way that reinforces the EBS program.

After several years of further training and preparation, including several trial periods, Manawatu launched both the EBS program and the restorative justice program at the beginning of the 2009 school year. Both programs fell under the name of MANA, an acronym partly in Maori language that includes an emphasis on support and care, personal goals, accepting others as part of the team, and ultimately achieving success.

Current Restorative Justice Structure

Manawatu's reactive restorative process is similar to those at Massey and Opotiki. If a student misbehaves in class, they are sent to room A-9, where a staff members helps them fill out a behavior re-think sheet (much like at the RPT room and the Ruma Whakaaro.) In room A-9, the student's behavior is classified as either a minor problem (disruption, failure to work in class), or a major problem (verbal or physical abuse, cheating). If it is a "minor" problem, then the student continues to attend class that day, and returns to the class they were sent out of the following day following a brief restorative meeting with the teacher. For "major" problems, the student's dean and/or a member of the senior management is notified of the situation and decides the course of action. Usually, the student is sent to the Student Support Room, where, like the Ruma Whakaaro, they work on assignments from the classes they miss. They remain in the support room until a restorative conference can be organized. It is up to the dean or senior management staff member to decide if the parents of the student are present at this conference; Napier estimates that parents are present about half the time. Napier also says that conferences are usually scheduled for the following day, limiting the amount of time that the student is out of class.[cxvi]

If a student accumulates several "minor" offenses, or is involved in an incident outside of the classroom, a restorative conference in the same mold as at Massey and Opotiki is organized including everyone involved. When students need to be sent home to prepare for a restorative conference, Manawatu, like Opotiki, often uses Section 27 rather then a traditional stand-down or suspension. Students at Manawatu can still be suspended for serious incidents, such as bringing a weapon to school or for multiple drug offenses. Manawatu also uses restorative classroom conferencing based upon Thorsborne's model.

Effective Behavior Support (EBS)

What sets Manawatu apart from Massey and Opotiki is its EBS program. EBS incorporates a variety of practices and functions to proactively improve relationships and student behavior. Extensive teacher training designed to help them better connect with students preceded implementation of the program and is ongoing. Standard behavioral guidelines, such as respect for the teacher and classmates, are agreed upon and posted in every classroom. A system called MANABUYs serves to reinforce this agreement. In each class, teachers reward certain students exemplifying positive behavior with Mana points, which are collected over time and go towards prizes decided upon by students.

This type of student involvement, which Napier says has been present throughout the whole process, is maintained through the MANA student group. The group consists of 25 students—one from each "tutor", or core, class—and meets once a week to discuss the MANA program as a whole and brainstorm improvements. These ideas are relayed to the staff MANA focus group, which can then take steps to act on them. Jude Richards, a dean at Manawatu and the facilitator of the MANA student group, thinks the group is important in helping staff and students find some "common ground" in their ideas for MANA and the school.[cxvii] Finding common ground, Richards believes, is essential to have "buy in of the programs from everyone involved."[cxviii] While the student group is a relatively new program—it only began in its current form at the

beginning of this school year—Richards believes the group has been beneficial in aiding Manawatu's adoption of the MANA program.

At Manawatu, the EBS program is seen as helping to lay the groundwork for success of the restorative justice program. Napier says he is "sure" that the "positive, proactive nature of MANA (EBS) had a huge part to play in the positive response to restorative practices" by both staff and students.[cxix] Parrant similarly believes the EBS program helped pave the way for the restorative program. Now, he says, "I don't think you could have one running without the other."[cxx] Parrant emphasizes the importance of teaching students appropriate behavior so that students have a model for change when they undergo a restorative conference, and says, "you can't teach respect and build relationships [through EBS] and then punish when something goes wrong."[cxxi]

Outcomes of the Restorative Justice program

Although MANA, which includes both the restorative justice and the EBS program, has only been at Manawatu for a short period of time, it has already had a significant statistical impact on the school. Between 2004-2008, prior to MANA, Manawatu averaged 38.2 stand-downs and 15.8 suspensions a year.[cxxii] In 2009, the first full year with MANA, Manawatu had a total of 7 stand-downs and 4 suspensions.[cxxiii] While this change is largely due to a change in policy, Manawatu has also seen a noticeable decrease in student incidents. For example, the number of student assaults on other students fell from 33 in 2008 to 5 in 2009.[cxxiv] There has also been a significant decrease in the number of students sent to the A-9 room (prior to 2009 it was known as the withdraw room), as teachers have been more successful at diffusing issues in class. Manawatu hasn't put together a comprehensive analysis of the effect of MANA of academic achievement, but Napier is confident that, over time, MANA will have an "increasingly beneficial effect on achievement, and that will be reflected in the stats."[cxxv]

Napier acknowledges that it is too early to make definitive judgments of the MANA program based upon statistics, but is encouraged by the early results and says that the MANA program has had a positive effect on the school culture. He says that from the moment the MANA program was fully implemented in 2009, there was a distinct "buzz" around the school with positive vibes apparent in the interactions between all members of the school community.[cxxvi] According to Napier, the relationship between staff and students, which was already "very good" prior to the MANA program, have seemingly grown "stronger by the day."[cxxvii] Richards agrees that the MANA program has "absolutely" had an impact outside of statistics.[cxxviii] She say she notices it most in "just the mannerisms of students around the school; it is a much friendlier environment, there is less bad language, and students seem to show more pride in the school."[cxxix]

For Parrant, the effect of the MANA program can be measured in his enjoyment of his job. He says, "in the old system, I was almost a policeman, because students learned to deny everything so I either had to break them or find out facts to prove them wrong."[cxxx] In this process, Parrant found that "every interaction I had with students or parents was negative," because the system was based upon punishment.[cxxxi] Now, however, Parrant finds he is able to interact much more positively with students and parents, because "students are accepting that the best thing they can do is tell the truth," and parents are generally pleased that the school is searching for a positive way forward with their kids.[cxxxii] Due to this change, Parrant says his job is "much more enjoyable, because I now feel like I am working with kids rather then against them."[cxxxiii]

Conclusion

Three different places, three different schools, three different systems of restorative justice, and similarly positive outcomes. The differences between the restorative justice programs at Massey High School, Opotiki College, and Manawatu College, and the positive impact that the programs have had at each school, illustrate the potential for school-based restorative justice programs in a variety of settings. Massey, a large, urban, diverse place, has developed a multi-varied support network designed to connect with students and has reaped the benefits in fewer suspensions and greater academic achievement. Opotiki, located in one of the poorest and most drug-heavy areas in New Zealand, has adapted its drug program and practically stopped suspending students altogether while attaining higher academic achievement levels then their decile score would indicate. Manawatu has established its restorative justice program in conjunction with a proactive program designed to promote positive behavior, and is finding that the two compliment one another and have greatly decreased the number of student incidents.

The restorative justice programs have been around for a different amounts of time at each school, providing a snapshot of the effects of the programs over time and the previously-mentioned "culture change" that takes time to occur. According to Thorsborne, it takes about five years for a restorative justice program to completely become part of a schools' "culture."[cxxxiv] This point rang true in the schools I visited. Staff at Massey and Opotiki (which is on the five-year threshold) predominately felt that the restorative justice program had become part of the schools culture and that there was now buy-in from the vast majority of staff members. While Manawatu has experienced positive early returns, Waynne Napier explains that there are still a number of staff members who haven't embraced the new system, something he is confident will change with time.[cxxxv]

While Massey and Opotiki have older and more developed programs then Manawatu, key staff members at all three schools share the attitude that there is always room for improvement and the search for new and better methods never ends. Maurie Abraham sums up this philosophy well. Abraham says "we don't just like to compare ourselves to other schools and are never satisfied with our accomplishments."[cxxxvi] He feels personally responsible for every student who "falls through the cracks" at Opotiki, even though only a few have since he took over.[cxxxvii]

Key staff members at the three schools generally gave similar advice to schools looking to start programs of restorative justice. The main themes were the need for strong, central leadership from the top (preferably the principal), a deliberative process that doesn't make too many drastic changes too quickly, and an attitude that recognizes that change won't necessarily occur overnight. Jude Moxon says it is helpful to have several restorative conferences as examples early on that staff members from the school can sit in on and get an idea of how the process works. According to Moxon, staff members often "have to experience first-hand the power of [restorative justice] to be fully understanding and accepting of it."

Margaret Thorsborne, the inspiration behind the restorative justice programs at Massey, Opotiki, Manawatu, and hundreds of other schools around the world, believes that the programs could be similarly successful in the United States.[cxxxviii] However, she believes this will require the creation of more student support staff positions at schools, strong leadership, and a shift in philosophy regarding the value of education. She says America is "caught up in the idea that wrongdoers must be punished" rather then working with them towards changing their behavior, as exemplified by the immense size of the prison system.[cxxxix]

Thorsborne's passion was evident when discussing her experience with restorative justice and the impact she believes it has had. She says that visiting schools after she helped install a program there, and viewing the progress, makes her feel "just absolutely wonderful."[cxl] She says one of the most valuable things for her has been the creation of a global network of friends who have grown

into what she calls a "movement" for change, which include Stewart Newby, Moxon, Abraham, and Napier.[cxli] Most importantly, she emphasizes the joy she feels in knowing that she has helped kids around the world. She says, "for every twenty people I train, their capacity to go out and influence other people's lives is just amazing."[cxlii]

Thorsborne believes it is important to continue to re-connect the abstract idea of school-based restorative justice with its practical goal: giving each child a chance to prosper through their education and the opportunity to follow their ambitions in life. Observing restorative interactions with students and staff members, and talking to students that had gone through the restorative process, was the most powerful aspect of my research. There was the 9th year Massey student who was the victim of bullying, a slightly built kid who says he generally has trouble speaking in front of others but who bravely shared the pain he was feeling at a restorative meeting in front of his tormenters. Afterword, he said it was helpful "just for everyone to say their own stuff, to share their stories with each other" and that the bullying has all but ceased.[cxliii] There was the 11th year student at Manawatu who had been in several fights and says he didn't used to be able to "control himself."[cxliv] Now, after several restorative conferences, he is thankful that the process gave him a second chance in school and has helped him avoid future fights by "making me stop and think about what I'm doing, about the potential consequences of my actions."[cxlv]

One student's story, however, stood out from the rest. Sophia, a 12th-year student at Massey, comes from a tough family background. Her father is involved in a gang, and both her parents have a deep mistrust in the school system; none of Sophia's five older siblings has graduated from high school. The issues followed Sophia to school. From her first day at Massey, she has, according to staff, been disrespectful in class, bullied others, and gotten into fights. She has been through so many restorative conferences that she has "lost count."[cxlvi] Massey staff say that Sophia would have been expelled from any other school a long time ago, probably as early as her first year. Sophia agrees with this.

Sophia initially rejected the restorative process. She says, "after all the bullying out there, to come into the same room and talk about it; that was hard for me. Having to open up in the restoratives was something I hated."[cxlvii] However, Sophia gradually developed strong relationships with student support staff, including Moxon, and came to appreciate the process. Aside from giving her a second (and third) chance in school, Sophia says that restorative process also helped her realize that "I'm not the only person on this earth, that understanding other peoples' feelings is important."[cxlviii] Now, Sophia says that restorative principles are ingrained in her and that she uses them in everyday interactions with her friends and family. Recently, Sophia and two of her siblings organized a family meeting based upon the restorative model to address a multitude of internal issues the family was having. Sophia says that they let "each person speak and then come up with a result, which is like what they do [at Massey]."[cxlix] Sophia says that the meeting was the first time the family had talked together like that in as long as she could remember, and that now the family is "much happier" and closer to one another.[cl]

The restorative process has affected Sophia so profoundly that she hopes one day to become a social worker that works in a restorative way with young kids like herself. She credits Moxon and others at Massey with inspiring this goal, saying, "the effect that they have had on me, I want to have a similar influence on other kids. I owe it all to them."[cli] She understands that it can be difficult to convince students to buy into the restorative program, as is took her a few years herself. However, she was adamant that schools in the United States shouldn't give up on trying to help kids stay in school and improve their behavior. She advised me: "Just take the restorative program back [to the US] and drum it into kid's heads. It will benefit them in the long run."[clii]

[i] Cameron, Lisa and Thorsborne, Margaret. Pg. 183.

[ii] Cairns, Benjamin. April 2, 2010.

[iii] Garcia, Daniel. March 29, 2010.

[iv] Blood, Peta and Thorsborne, Margaret. Pg. 15.

[v] Information provided by Massey High School.

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Farrington, Chris. May 27, 2010.

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[x] Newby, Stuart. May 17, 2010.

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