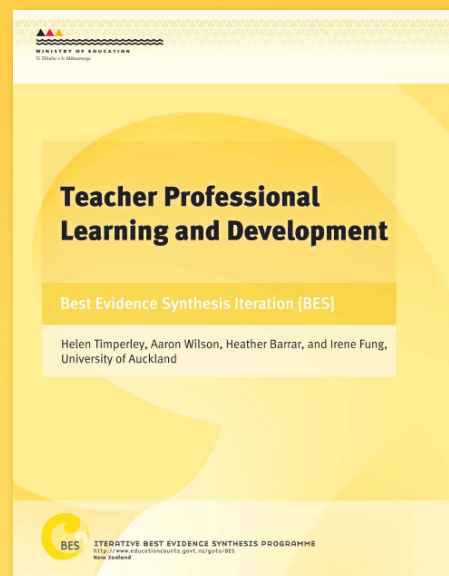


# Improve student attendance and engagement by improving the social and emotional environment: restorative justice

This is one of a series of cases that illustrate the findings of the best evidence syntheses (BESs). Each is designed to support the professional learning of educators, leaders and policy makers.



## BES cases: Insight into what works

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The best evidence syntheses (BESs) bring together research evidence about ‘what works’ for diverse (all) learners in education. Recent BESs each include a number of cases that describe actual examples of professional practice and then analyse the findings. These cases support educators to grasp the big ideas behind effective practice at the same time as they provide vivid insight into their application.

Building as they do on the work of researchers and educators, the cases are trustworthy resources for professional learning.

### Using the BES cases

The BES cases overview provides a brief introduction to each of the cases. It is designed to help you quickly decide which case or cases could be helpful in terms of your particular improvement priorities.

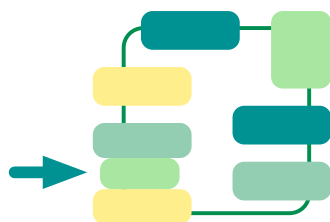
Use the cases with colleagues as catalysts for reflecting on your own professional practice and as starting points for delving into other sources of information, including related sections of the BESs. To request copies of the source studies, use the Research Behind the BES link on the BES website.

The conditions for effective professional learning are described in the Teacher Professional Learning and Development BES and condensed into the ten principles found in the associated International Academy of Education summary (Timperley, 2008).

Note that, for the purpose of this series, the cases have been re-titled to more accurately signal their potential usefulness.

### Responsiveness to diverse (all) learners

Use the BES cases and the appropriate curriculum documents to design a response that will improve student outcomes



The different BESs consistently find that any educational improvement initiative needs to be responsive to the diverse learners in the specific context. Use the inquiry and knowledge-building cycle tool to design a collaborative approach to improvement that is genuinely responsive to your learners

### **Improve student attendance and engagement by improving the social and emotional environment: restorative justice**

This case describes a framework for implementing a whole-school focus on improving the social and emotional environment of the classroom and school. Using this framework, a large multicultural high school was able to significantly raise attendance, engagement, and NCEA achievement.

In the case, a school guidance leader identified what support the school needed to improve school culture. As a result of internal research, externally provided professional learning, and a new restorative justice philosophy, much stronger connections were forged between classrooms, school leadership, and community. Supported by an effective system, constructive new practices were developed.

## Re-culturing and restructuring to solve a problem

### Context

#### Setting

This case was set in a large suburban, decile 6 secondary school with an ethnically diverse roll of approximately 2,500 students: 55% European, 20% Māori, 10% Asian, 6% Sāmoan, 2% Cook Islands Māori, 2% Tongan, 1% Niuean, and 4% other. The teaching staff of 150 included three levels of management. The Ministry of Education had noted high suspension and stand-down rates and required the school to act to reduce these.

#### Time

Senior management, middle management, and support personnel were involved in an initial 3-day facilitator training session on restorative justice practices, conducted by an external facilitator. This was followed by a half-day workshop for the general teaching staff. Ongoing whole-staff development was facilitated by those trained as internal facilitators, with refresher courses by the external facilitator. The project began in 2002 and, at the time of writing, has continued to develop.

#### Focus of PD

The principal and guidance counsellor decided to explore restorative justice practices as an alternative to removing disruptive students from the school. Staff involvement in the PD was mandatory. A cohesive, whole-school behaviour management programme was proposed to support staff in their day-to-day managing of student behaviour. This programme continues to be developed and refined in response to needs.

#### Goals

The goals of the restorative justice approach included:

- a reduction in student suspensions, stand-downs, expulsions, and exclusions;
- an improvement in the social/emotional environment of the school.

#### Prior to PD

Prior to the implementation of the project, the school had taken a confrontational and punitive approach to dealing with disruptive or destructive behaviour. Suspension and stand-down rates were well above those of similar schools.

### Impact on student learners

#### After PD

The project was initiated in 2002 and fully implemented from the beginning of 2003. As can be seen in the graph to the right, suspensions fell by 22.5% over the next two years. By 2004, the number of suspensions was lower than average for both decile and school type. Since the restorative justice programme was put into operation, academic achievement has improved (as shown by NCEA results, and aTTle scores for year 9 and 10 students).

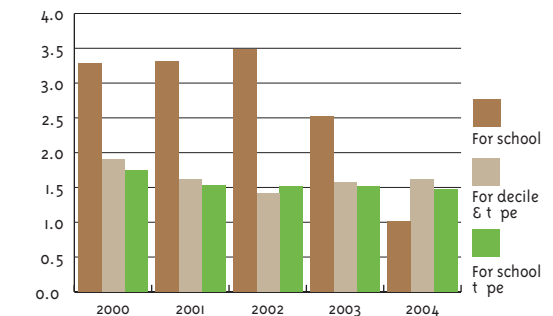
Student

*I got a lot of ideas on what people think and feel about the same problems and probably how to solve them.*

*There is a more collaborative, relaxed atmosphere. The restorative justice identity of the school has built an expectation of connection, relating. Teachers and students live the philosophy. It has changed the culture of the school.*

Teacher

Comparison of percentage of suspensions



Year	For school (Series 1)	For decile & type (Series 2)	For school type (Series 3)
2000	3.29%	1.90%	1.75%
2001	3.31%	1.62%	1.53%
2002	3.48%	1.41%	1.51%
2003	2.52%	1.58%	1.52%
2004	1.04%	1.62%	1.48%

Cognitive dissonance

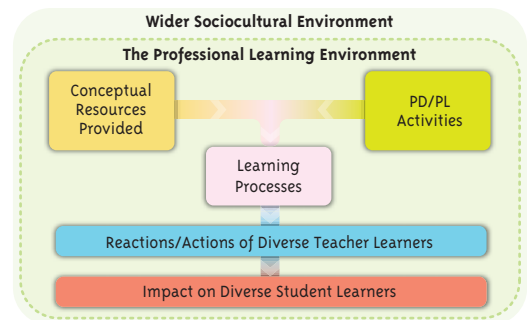
The high stand-down and suspension rates were symptomatic of wider issues of student behaviour and school culture that were already concerning the staff and management. The school's practice had been based on a model of students being held responsible for their actions—a model that located the deficit within the individual. In response to the directive from the Ministry of Education and in line with their goal of improving the school's social and emotional environment, management began to search for alternative methods of dealing with disruptive or harmful student behaviour.

Seeking information

The head of guidance initially suggested the restorative justice programme after attending a conference where the principles of restorative practice had been presented. The head of guidance and the principal began researching restorative practice by means of professional readings. They then decided to use the expert who had presented at the conference to train selected staff as facilitators and to provide workshops for the whole staff. This externally provided professional development involved presentations of restorative philosophy and practice, discussions with colleagues regarding implications for their own practice, demonstrations of the kinds of interactions that would promote reconnection with students and build or enhance teacher–student relationships, and opportunities to role-play these with colleagues.

Receiving tools/structures to use with students

While restorative justice has a philosophy of connectedness, relationships, and respect, it was first introduced to the staff as a behaviour management tool to help teachers deal with disruptive students in their own classrooms. The focus on meeting an immediate and recognised need was an important consideration when initially engaging teachers. Teachers were given tools and structures to help them to build positive, constructive relationships with students. These took the forms of: language with which to engage in restorative conversations; questioning processes; and a progressive structure of referrals to specialised staff for support.



Co-constructing new practice

Once all staff members were trained in implementing restorative practices, the process of embedding the concepts and philosophy into the unique context of the school community began. Development of 'The Massey Way' required research, analysis, and consultation with the entire community—teachers, students, parents, and beyond—in order to identify clear objectives, principles, and values that could be integrated with restorative philosophy and practice.

Since then, staff researchers have explored the implementation and the impact of changed practice in terms of the original goals for the project. They have made recommendations that have shaped further development of the philosophy and practice within the school.

Extensive analysis of data relating to attendance, achievement, and exclusions, together with surveys of teachers, students, and parents involved in restorative conferences, has helped the school assess the effectiveness of restorative practices and adapt them more effectively to the context. Community building, mutual accountability, and shared responsibility are recurring themes in feedback.

In order to identify objectives that would be widely endorsed, the board of trustees consulted extensively with all major stakeholders, taking into account the Treaty of Waitangi, the special character of the school, the aspirations of tangata whenua, community expectations, national education priorities, and feedback from staff, students, and parents.

To maintain the 'critical mass' essential for the sustainability of the programme, training opportunities have been provided for new teachers and new internal facilitators (drawn from all departments within the school).

Facilitator

*I think there should be more shadow coaching ... to make sure that everyone is delivering the same message in the same way.*

There are frequent opportunities to share how the programme is working, discuss concerns, and make suggestions, so that it can continue to be adapted to meet the specific needs of the school and community. Conferences are documented so that lessons learned from one situation can be used to inform other, similar situations.

*We need a standard procedure across the school, rather than being dependent on deans ... the process becomes more transparent and predictable.*

Teacher

A further opportunity for sharing and reflecting on the school's success has come through telephone conferences with other schools. Mentoring of colleagues, coaching prior to conferences, and preparing summaries of feedback have helped facilitators to both share their expertise and develop their facilitation skills.

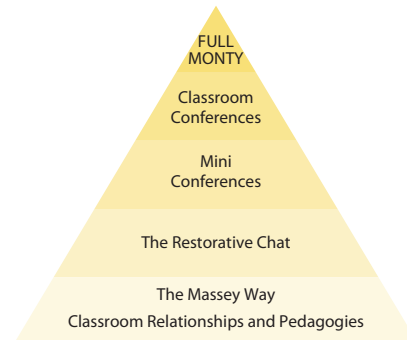
### Why did this work?

This programme was introduced in response to dissonance created by recognition that current practice was failing to address behaviour issues. Teachers were given knowledge and then materials directly applicable to their own needs and contexts and asked to provide feedback on how these worked for them. School leaders were involved in initiating the programme and as members of the internal facilitation team. Once the staff were trained, the board of trustees consulted with the whole school community to develop a set of shared goals and objectives. The programme continues to be informed and shaped by research, fact finding, and discussion around issues of effectiveness. The philosophy, objectives, and practices have provided the basis for a learning community committed to a shared set of values and beliefs. Shared ideals and continued dialogue ensure that the restorative practices remain relevant and dynamic.

After being introduced to them in workshops, teachers used restorative practices as a new approach to behaviour management. Positive reactions from students, and the effectiveness of this approach in reducing undesirable behaviour, convinced teachers of its worth. The time involved, which had been viewed as a barrier to implementation, was now seen as an investment. Gradually, the implementation became ingrained in practice and began to affect the culture of the school.

The principle of reflection, repair, and reconnection is at the heart of restorative practice. It is underpinned by a philosophy of locating the deficit in the relationship and engaging in restorative dialogue when interpersonal connections have been damaged. This philosophy, together with the shared objectives, has promoted the growth of a staff learning community.

Pyramid of restorative practices



The philosophy has been given strong support by leadership. This can be seen in the fixed-term management position created for the coordinator and the establishment of a leadership team (which includes representatives from all departments) to drive change, model and evaluate practice, and continue to research effectiveness. From this base, 'The Massey Way' has moved beyond behaviour management towards a whole-school philosophy where relationships are central—things are done with, rather than to, students. Students have been reframed as partners in their own education.

Teacher

*[We have] grown a culture of mutual collaboration.*

Through active consultation with the school community, school leadership has ensured that all those affected by decisions have shared input and understandings, gaining support and building relationships that extend beyond the school grounds.

*The school continues to monitor the process, learn from its experiences, and further develop the restorative model.*

Researcher

The school philosophy has encouraged staff to seek further professional learning opportunities in support of other needs as they have become apparent. The school has, for example, become part of the Te Kotahitanga project and some staff have participated in additional workshops on restorative practices.

Dissonance was created for the teachers when they recognised that current behaviour management practices were not effective in reducing the incidence of suspensions and exclusions or promoting a positive social and emotional climate in the school. Leadership sought alternative practices, which were implemented and found to be effective. The positive effects of the new practice led staff to embrace the underlying principles and philosophy, which influenced the school's social and emotional environment and thus the relationships between members of the school community—particularly teacher–student relationships. This led to students being reframed as active participants in their own education rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

### How did the school make this work?

The staff were motivated to improve behaviour management in their classrooms. Effective tools were made available and met the perceived need, resulting in positive attitudes towards the programme. As a result, the principles and philosophy of restorative justice were embraced and used to address the wider objectives, principles, and values negotiated with and shared by the community. Dedicated leadership, a strong research base, community consultation, and a dynamic approach to adapting the philosophy to the school's unique context have encouraged the construction of new practices, and systems to support them.

## How this case links to the synthesis

### Reframing teachers' social constructions of students

- 9.2.1.2 Voluntary or compulsory
- 9.2.1.4 Leadership
- 9.2.1.7 Professional learning goals
- 9.2.2.1 Integration of theory and practice (see also Box 8.7)
- 9.2.2.4 An emphasis on pedagogical relationships
- 9.2.3.1 Professional instruction followed by multiple opportunities to learn
- 9.2.4.1 Creating dissonance with current position

### Topical issues

- 10.2 Issue 2: The role of school leaders in promoting professional development
- 10.4 Issue 4: Professional learning communities
- 10.5 Issue 5: Professional learning in secondary school contexts
- Chapter 11 Sustainability

## Reflective questions

Changes went beyond the classroom to re-culturing and restructuring throughout the school.

- How did the school actively engage in solving the problem and apply new theory and practice?
- What factors allowed it to change successfully?

### Source

Moxon, J. (2003). *A study of the impact of the Restorative Thinking Programme within the context of a large multi-cultural New Zealand secondary school*. MA (Education) thesis, Auckland, NZ.