

Restorative Practice in New Zealand Schools: Social development through relational justice

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Abstract

This article proposes that restorative justice practices (RjPs), as used in New Zealand schools, are better understood as an instrument of social development than a behaviour management practice. Concerns about the achievement of Māori students are relocated, from an individualised psychological and pedagogical problem to an interdisciplinary context of historical and social development. Social constructionist theory is suggested as a lens through which RjPs in schools may be seen as the intentional production of respectful social relationships, rather than as behaviour management. A restorative process has the productive capacity to restore healthy relational functioning, both for those who have been offended against and those who have offended. It is argued that the primary function of restorative justice in schools is not about resolving specific conflicts, but rather, about the production and maintenance of respectful relationship, which is the antithesis of colonised relationship. Such a position reflects accountability on a communal, rather than individualised basis, and accords with recent moves in the United Nations Development Programme to look at Human Development as building agentive capacity.

Keywords: restorative justice practice, behaviour management, social construction, Māori achievement, relational justice, human development

Introduction

The adaptation of restorative justice conferencing (RJC) practices and principles into schools is now well advanced in several countries around the world. By and large, reported outcomes suggest that these initiatives have been successful. In New Zealand, RJC was initially introduced to reduce suspensions (The Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003), and these have reduced significantly (Ministry of Education [MOE], n.d.(a)). But it is the broader range of practices, and their unforeseen results, that stand out. McCluskey and colleagues remarked that in many schools participating

in a pilot in Scotland, the initial focus on the use of formal conferencing for disciplinary hearings was transformed into a broader project which schools saw as being about 'their school relationships, processes and priorities' (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 210). They concluded that restorative practice 'can make a substantial contribution to thinking about conflict in schools and help to promote social justice in education' (p. 199). This kind of whole school transformation has been repeated many times in New Zealand schools also, and in fact, around the world, restorative 'justice' in schools became restorative 'practice' or restorative 'approaches', signalling the adaptation of restorative justice principles and the conferencing process to a range of practices, including classroom circles, mediation and one-on-one conversations or 'restorative chats'. It is also now well accepted internationally that the use of restorative practices in schools can have broad effects on the culture of the whole school (Morrison, Blood, & Thorsborne, 2005). In New Zealand, schools that embrace a whole-school approach have been found to do better on all measures, including suspensions and exclusions, as well as achievement statistics (MOE, n.d.(a)), than schools that used the practices for disciplinary and behaviour management purposes only.

Despite all this, there is room for much further development (see Selman, Cremin, & McCluskey, 2013). In particular, the theory underpinning restorative justice practice (RJP) has lagged well behind the adoption of the practices, both in schools and in justice contexts (Llewellyn, 2012). A major challenge is the question to what extent are the practices transformative of students' lives, echoing concerns voiced by Grey (2005) that restorative justice conferences do not change the high levels of disadvantage and social exclusion that are already experienced by many young offenders and their families. Grey points to a tendency to see the restorative justice conference as a cognitive developmental process which renders offenders responsible for their own actions, such that not only will they repair the harm they have done and be remorseful, but they should also be more able to manage the social risks they face in their daily lives, as well as more able to take advantage of the opportunities that society affords them. This account reflects a psychological approach to the practices and student management that is focused on the behaviour of the individual: when there are behavioural difficulties in schools, there is no apparent requirement for the school to take responsibility for, or to examine, their relationship practices. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many schools embracing a restorative approach to discipline also change their whole school culture, seeing the practices as permeating the community, rather than simply about making individual students behave better.

Policy Responses to School Disaffection

The original motivation for restorative practices in New Zealand schools came from Justice. An important motivating factor for the initial trial of 'RJC' into schools was the concern of judges in Youth Justice that 80% of youth offending was perpetrated by young people who had dropped out of school (Becroft & Thompson, 2006; McElrea, 1996). The trial of RJs in our secondary schools followed the introduction of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in judicial or regulatory contexts by the then department of social welfare in 1989 (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). Restorative justice

was seen by the Ministry of Justice as ‘hav(ing) strong alignment with Māori values such as reconciliation, reciprocity and whānau [family] involvement’ (Ministry of Justice, 2009). So the use of processes that more closely resemble indigenous practices was a key consideration in the introduction of restorative justice into both our courts and our schools, just as they had been in the introduction of the FGC legislation. The practice of holding hui (meetings) to which all with an interest are invited when things go wrong is well accepted in Māoridom. It includes protocols for welcome, order of speaking, ways of speaking, who should be present, and many other explicit and implicit cultural assumptions about how hosts and guests should interact, and how children should be cared for (Berryman & Bateman, 2008). Many of these cultural understandings, including practices from other indigenous cultures, have been incorporated into restorative practices and are commonly accepted in different contexts around the world.

Māori Student Achievement

There is significant concern in this country about the health and social development status of the indigenous population across a range of key indicators. Māori constitute just under 15% of the population; but suspensions and exclusions from schools of young Māori, particularly Māori males, are two-and-a-half times more frequent than New Zealand European students (MOE, n.d.(a)). Māori make up 51% of those imprisoned, are twice as likely to be unemployed and are recognised as having the poorest health status (see www.govt.nz). In relating these social indicators, I am not simply drawing further unhelpful attention to the ‘failure’ of Māori to achieve. Rather, I am locating the project of introducing restorative practices into schools in a broader context, one where the engagement of young Māori in mainstream schools may be seen as part of a pattern of resistance by and deprivation of Māori across a swathe of social life.

In the project of bringing down the statistics on educational exclusion, an underlying belief is that those who achieve in education have greater access to the goods of society than those who do not. The judges who promoted restorative justice in schools were certainly assuming that keeping students in school would improve their life chances. However, simply keeping them in school is not transformative *per se*, so attention turned to the ways Māori students experience school, following research by Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, and Richardson (2003) that showed that Māori students prefer to learn from teachers with whom they have trusting relationships. The MOE’s (2009) *Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012* ‘emphasised that relationships between teachers and Māori students are at the heart of student engagement and achievement and that the system has been inequitable for Māori learners’ (MOE, n.d.(a)).

The basis of this project is that if teachers worked differently with Māori students, achievement outcomes would be improved. And indeed, a flagship programme of the MOE, Te Kotahitanga, claimed significant success in improving Māori students’ achievement through a ‘culturally responsive pedagogy of relations’, defined thus: ‘when educators create learning contexts within their classroom; where power is shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of

interdependence; where culture counts; where learning is interactive, dialogic and spirals; where participants are connected to one another through the establishment of a common vision for what constitutes excellence in educational outcomes' (MOE, n.d.(b)).

Te Kotahitanga locates the problems of Māori learners in the teacher–student relationship, directly linking teacher behaviour and attitudes to student learning outcomes. The project, which is no longer directly funded, employed Māori mentors to help teachers change the quality of their relationships with learners, addressing their assumptions about Māori ways of life and offering commentary and information about how to interact successfully with Māori students. Figures published by the project (MOE, n.d.(c)) show that numbers of Māori students achieving the National Certificate of Educational Attainment went up in many participating schools.

Key Features of Restorative Practice

The notion of respect which is the basis of restorative practice can be described as an equitable, and inclusive, power relationship. This position is reflected in the oft-quoted definition by the International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP):

The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior [*sic*] when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging *with* mode. If this restorative hypothesis is valid, then it has significant implications for many disciplines. (International Institute of Restorative Practices, 2008)

The 'engaging *with* mode' bears a strong resemblance to the definition of the 'culturally responsive pedagogy of relations' put forward by Te Kotahitanga and appears to be compatible with it. However, while Māori values are of course important and central in the New Zealand context, the school classroom often includes a range of cultures. And we need a way of theorising this factor in approaching a notion of culturally responsive discipline. Restorative justice conferences employ processes such as the inclusion of the voice of the 'victim' and members of the communities of both or all parties in a facilitated conversation, within a framework of respect for all those involved, manifested as a right to speak and to be heard. The process of the restorative conference is set up to produce a common understanding of what happened; to restore the possibility of respectful, ongoing relationship amongst the parties; and to find ways of making amends for wrongs that have been done. What makes restorative conferences, mediations, chats and circles 'restorative', is the underlying principle of respect, an inclusive process, and the objective to develop trust within forms of relationship where those involved can make amends. The expectation of many voices talking respectfully together manifests a principle of transparency, an acceptance of the right of each person present to put their perception of the story, and faith in the

capacity of those present to come to a commonly agreed resolution. Although a restorative process can end with a recommendation for a punishment, the restorative conference is less about determining who is to blame and more about changing understanding in order to produce different actions in the future, on the part of the offender, and to provide for the needs of the victim resulting from the wrongdoing. A restorative conversation brings people who were previously not in any kind of relation, unless perhaps opposing positions, into conversation. It has ground rules and it has a process. Clearly, although they are triggered by breaches of established social expectations, this process and these outcomes de-emphasise an authoritarian, disciplinary objective, focusing instead on increasing shared understanding. While a change in behaviour is sought, the real objective is to transform the social relations amongst the people involved.

It is now well understood that the form or process of the conversation is an important aspect of successful RJP. What is less well understood is why this is so. Braithwaite, a criminologist, has attempted to explain how restorative justice works by appealing to the use of shaming (Braithwaite & Mugford, 1994). A major limitation of theoretical analyses of RJP using concepts of shaming and punishment is that they locate the problem within the psychology of individuals in isolation, when the basis of restorative practice emphasises respectful *relationship*. Intentional shaming is also problematic as a practice because it may retraumatise victims of an offence (McCluskey et al., 2008). Although forms of restoration may produce shame, shaming for its own sake is not a restorative or just practice. The Development Team at the University of Waikato proposed a form of conversation on principles based on narrative therapy (White, 2007), a process that aims to reposition both parties in the story of what happened, and deliberately produces both new identities and new relationships. This process is theorised using social constructionist theory about the productive nature of language. It does not require recourse to the inner psychology of the person (Burr, 2003). At its best, this process is an investigation of how the parties came into conflict, with the presumption that all would prefer to live more peaceably, and that the offender (and their family) wants to make amends. It is well accepted that a restorative process cannot proceed successfully without this basic, shared priority. At its heart, therefore, is a shared sense of justice.

Education and Social Justice

Improving learning outcomes for Māori students and other similarly motivated educational projects clearly fall within a framework of social justice. Those with better educational status tend to have better access to socio-economic opportunities. And there are other arguably more important, and just, social objectives. Mutual respect is a basic requirement of a civil society. Another is the capacity for self-determination. In New Zealand, we also have the explicit expectation set out in the Treaty of Waitangi, that places a responsibility on Māori and Pākehā (a New Zealander of European descent, usually English speaking) to live together as equal Treaty partners. In particular, the Treaty places a responsibility on Pākehā to honour the rangatiratanga (rights of self-determination, authority) of the tangata whenua (indigenous people). Māori

culture is strongly relational; and, the notion of owning property is less clearly related to individual rights than it is to collective responsibility. This is well recognised in respect of land, but it is also the case that the care and development of children are seen as a collective responsibility.

According to the New Zealand Curriculum (MOE, 2007), the aim of schools is to produce citizens who will support our national aspirations for ‘confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners’ (<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/>). This vision is underpinned by 12 values, including enquiry, diversity, equity and respect. Alongside these values are five key competencies: language, thinking, relating to others, participating and contributing, and managing self. The curriculum was widely consulted beyond the education community, and it has been very well received. I, therefore, suggest with some confidence that the values and competencies detailed in the Curriculum document describe the kinds of social relationships New Zealanders aspire to. The requirement that all children must attend school between the ages of 6 and 16 years of age means that there is an element of authoritative regulatory or directive shaping of the learning and by implication of the behaviour of young people. Not only what is learned, but how children are to be cared for, is proscribed to an extent in educational law.

The idea of social justice must begin with the expectation of inclusion, rather than exclusion; the introduction of restorative justice into schools was certainly about *not* excluding young people from education. The fact that, at its beginning in schools, restorative justice was about disciplining offenders should not blind us to the fact that justice is not fundamentally about crime and punishment. It is an idea about how people might live together equitably in diverse communities. Probably the most well-recognised model of social justice is ‘justice as fairness’, notably theorised by Rawls (1972), among others. This form of justice, commonly called ‘distributive justice’, is an idea about principles for sharing wealth among diverse members of communities. This can be seen readily as a basis for economic and social development in the OECD sense. Restorative justice by contrast is an idea about the individual and relational impact of the *process* of the law, including disciplining those who transgress social boundaries. Principles of restorative justice articulated by Zehr (2002) include maintaining or restoring respectful relationship, peaceful resolution of conflict and making amends, rather than working out who is to blame and meting out appropriate punishment—though as already noted, punishment is not precluded from a restorative process. This form of justice is founded in the recognition of human dignity. Whilst this certainly involves the recognition of individuals, it is grounded in an ethical understanding of common humanity. Indeed, Llewellyn (2012) has recently argued that restorative justice is rooted in a relational theory of justice.

In her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young (1990) wrote: ‘A model of the unoppressive city offers an understanding of social relations without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among strangers with whom they are not in community’ (p. 303). I have admired this position for a long time: it points to something that is not clear in humanistic approaches to human relationships, namely that it is more difficult to understand and show empathy for someone who is very unlike oneself, than for someone who is. It seems to me that this

is a useful characterisation of the citizenship task required of societies—and schools—who open their borders to strangers and persons from diverse communities: to learn how to live with diversity and the constant potential for conflict born of ignorance of difference. The task then is not to learn everything about every individual culture or student's background, but to work out what kind of professional, personal and mental 'deportment' will enable a teacher to work with the children of strangers about whom one may know very little. It seems to me that a focus on disciplinary purposes, with the associated preoccupation with the internal psychology of individuals, detracts from the real impact of RJP, which is that it provides a basis for helping both teachers and students to manage themselves within complex sociocultural contexts.

A Process for Re-establishing Self-determination

The fact that many schools do see the practices as more about school culture than about discipline suggests that the underlying principles of restorative justice have prevailed. The principle of respect that underlies restorative justice can be seen as the fundamental condition of kindness among strangers: one must approach the Other as one about whom little is known, but whose right to exist is not in question. In models using shaming, the fundamental assumption is that the Other wants to be part of the group, and that in order to do so, they must behave as the rules of the group determine. The identity of the Other as a member of the group is conditional upon their compliance with group norms. Such discipline, in my view, is fundamentally abusive because it makes the existence of the person within the group conditional. It is no wonder that the response of many young people to this form of discipline is opposition. Most young people in euro-western contexts have been brought up in a child-centred philosophy, where their right to self-determination has been strongly encouraged and is unquestioned. For young Māori, the same may not be true: they have the example of the Treaty of Waitangi, that gives the right of self-determination to Māori, and they have the examples of respectful relationship that pervade Māori culture. But history suggests that their right to education is conditional upon their achieving as Pākehā, and not as Māori. This can be seen in a range of ways, but primarily, it is encapsulated in the early legal requirement to speak English at school. Māori went along with this, but at a very high cost: for many, the loss of their language within three generations.

As noted already, Māori protocols have influenced the development of restorative practice. I suggest that the valuing of respect in restorative practice to an extent echoes the primacy of relational practice in Māoridom. RJP also links well with a decolonising agenda, as well as with the project of peace-building, which, as I understand it, is a basis of much work on restorative justice by among others Zehr (1990, 2002) and colleagues (e.g. Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Pranis, 2005; Toews & Zehr, 2003). This stance represents a major repositioning from a retributive or corrective approach to disciplinary processes, challenging their inherent individualism. However, the dominance of the individualised subject of psychology (Sampson, 1993) stands in the way of the systemic and behavioural transformations required.

Theorising Behaviour Change Through RJP

It is possible for a conversation to set out intentionally to achieve a transformative experience. Social constructionism offers a theoretical framework for understanding the deliberate production of preferred identities and relationship, in this instance, through positional analysis of the relationships produced in spoken language (Burr, 2003; Davies & Harré, 1990). I have argued elsewhere that quality relationships are produced in speaking—with others—and therefore we who are interested in a social justice agenda need to watch what we say (Drewery, 2005). Different ways of speaking produce different effects on the person spoken to. For most people, being spoken to as if one is a sovereign agent of one's own life, or being called into such a position, is preferable to being spoken to in a demeaning or subordinating way. I propose that the form and practice of restorative conversations offer a process where no one is demeaned; where each participant in the conversation is approached as if they have sovereignty, or agency, in their own life; and all participants are affirmed as valued members of the school community. I would go so far as to propose that this is a defining feature of RJP. By contrast, many schools tend to be aimed at rendering students as a particular kind of subject, one who is compliant; there may be little room for consideration by the student of the meaningfulness of what is being required or for the agency of the student—or indeed, for the relationships within which their behaviour is manifested.

Restorative conversations assume the possibility and enable the production of common understanding, including the potential to develop new understanding of the underlying problems associated with student behaviours that lead to suspension. One of the ways in which this occurs is through the experience of empathy. It is possible to see offending against other persons as a breakdown of the ability of the perpetrator to 'walk in the moccasins' of those whom they offend against. Indeed, I would guess that many people hold an unformed belief that, 'if the perpetrator knew how hard I worked for x' or 'understood the difficult circumstances [insert what you will] of my life', he or she would never have done what they did. There is a kind of unspoken, human social accounting that allows us to think that if we follow the laws of society, work hard and pay our taxes, we deserve not to be targeted by offenders. One of the most affecting aspects of a restorative conference for those involved is the telling of the personal stories. Often it turns out that the story of the offender is totally surprising, and just as affecting as the story of loss or harm of those offended against. Hearing such stories can help to unpick the social accounts we hold about our own deservingness. We may hear during the process about some terrible situations and perspectives that cannot easily be imagined by people whose lives reflect dominant assumptions. Sharing and hearing stories is a major ingredient in the restorative process. The best restorative outcomes are those where both or all parties develop understanding of how the problem came about, *as well as* what should be done now, and they reach (preferably shared) commitment to guard against it happening again. This is not only a matter of reparation, but a kind of developmental learning by the people involved. The process of the conversation has brought the participants into a sense of their own ability to act differently such that all involved are not placed in positions where they are of lesser value than others. The development of shared

understanding and mutual respect amongst very different individuals is the test of a successful restorative process.

The Restoration of Moral Agency

I propose that the productive element of RJP can be characterised as calling out the moral agency of a person. It is possible to develop the capacity, and sensitivity, of facilitators/speakers, so that they can notice and reliably produce such ways of speaking. If this is accepted, we could go on to consider whether this element is present in the speaking that goes on inside a conversation that purports to be restorative. For example, when someone who has been wronged states what the effects of the wrongdoing have been on them, without putting anyone else in the wrongdoer position, this leaves open a space. If the wrongdoer responds with statements that keep him or her in the first person, such as ‘Well I didn’t mean to hurt people like that’ (or even, though a step further than one might expect to begin with, ‘I didn’t mean to hurt you like that’), the statement is spoken from an *agentive* position, a step towards the (re-) establishment of moral strength. From there, ownership of the wrongdoing is not a huge step. Of course, a restorative conversation seldom goes so smoothly or so quickly, but the facilitation of such conversation should be about eliciting agentive statements by all parties to the conversation, so that they ‘own’ the outcomes, appropriately to their role in the problem.

The principle of working to restore the agency of those involved pertains to both formal and informal restorative conversations. What is being restored then is the agency of the person(s) involved, within the community of which they are part. In a classroom situation or school that aspires to a restorative ethos, there would already be an expectation that we show one another respect around here, and this is the basis of the call to restore community when disrespect has been demonstrated. This baseline principle is akin to ‘good faith’, for example, in a work place, where transparency and the expectation that all persons will engage in good faith is a primary principle against which all interactions are judged within the organisation.

Using ‘I’ statements is a familiar approach, but respectful speaking is more than that because it includes the expectation of relationship: respect and good faith cannot be performed alone. It is not the intention of restorative conversation to paper over the cracks of a rift in relationships, to restore the illusion of respect. RJP is about setting a standard for relationship that requires each person to strive towards agentive responsibility for their own position in collaboration with others who they may or may not like: and it is also about accepting that there is a plethora of different positions that people can take up. RJP is not about making everyone feel good or the same. It offers a way of working through issues when there is difference and no common basis of understanding.

Equally, RJP is *not* about teachers laying down their legitimate authority as teachers. Respect for difference is an acceptance that different people have different strengths and different roles to play in different fields of human endeavour. This includes the understanding of the role of the teacher to teach, as well as to maintain a peaceable classroom and respectful relationships within it. Indeed, the teacher should

model this approach: which does not mean they must accept any form of behaviour in the classroom. Where there is a restorative commitment, there should also be a commitment by the teachers to offer respect to their students in the same way they expect students to offer respect to themselves and to other students. A commitment to be restorative requires appropriate respect: it does not require anyone *not* to raise problems, or to hold their sense of being disrespected, just to keep the peace. The assumption underlying the primacy I have given to agentic positioning is that every person has a right to be here, and there is a place for every person. In state schools in New Zealand, every child has a right to be there; how to do this when there is dissonance is what RJP is about. Thus, I am offering an interpretation of RJP, that is not simply about discipline and maintaining the rules. The test of a restorative school then is whether and how agency is possible for everyone present, without homogenising the community.

Arguably, we may have reached a stage where the mandate of schools has become significantly blurred in respect of their developmental obligation. In the twenty-first century, it is well acknowledged that societies are becoming more complex and local communities embrace a greater diversity than ever. There is, on the face of it, more and more reason why there would be less commonality among the communities who hold expectations of a school, and every reason to anticipate increasing opportunity for conflict and misunderstanding within its various communities. It may no longer be the case that we can assume agreement on the nature of teachers' mandate from parents to develop the moral standing of their children. At the very least, it seems clear that a universal subject can no longer be presumed as a basis for citizenship, such as frames the New Zealand Curriculum objective. It can neither be assumed that every child's moral/cognitive development follows the same trajectory, nor that they would end up, given even the most conducive of circumstances, in the same place. Thus in state schools, where every citizen child has a right to attend, the teacher behaviours, pedagogy, pastoral care and behavioural discipline required to produce this ideal subject may not be as relevant as in more homogeneous (or more authoritarian) societies and schools.

RJP as Developmental Pedagogy

Education is well understood as a major tool for development in so-called less-developed countries. It is not usually understood as a tool for development in 'developed' countries, although social equality through improving educational outcomes is a major focus of concern in many such countries. Justice is generally understood as an underlying motivation and at the same time, a process for achieving social equity. The economist Amartya Sen, who was an architect of the conceptualisation of the work of the United Nations Development Programme (2010), argues that deprivation and oppression are of central concern for human development projects (Sen, 1999). He argues that individual agency is central to addressing deprivations, such as poverty, hunger and absence of political freedoms, which he characterises as deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than of resources, such as food and money. More recently, Sen (2009) has argued that justice is not a universal principle, but rather, it is the

capacity to accommodate different points of view, such that society becomes less unjust. This capacity he describes as ‘public reason’, which is the capacity to hold a conversation among many voices, to negotiate and navigate through difficulties, when there are competing viewpoints and no clear way forward. He argues that diversity, rather than a unified principle is the condition within which a theory of justice must be forged. Nussbaum (2011) takes up this ‘capability’ approach, arguing that ‘All nations, then, are developing nations, in that they contain problems of human development and struggles for a fully adequate quality of life and for minimal justice. All are currently failing at the aim of ensuring dignity for all and opportunity for each person’ (p. 16).

By introducing the idea of development as freedom and justice as agency, Sen broadens the project of development to argue that the deprivation of the capacity for participation is, or should be, the preferred central issue for those interested in development. In describing freedom as agency, he argues that ‘... freedom is not only the basis of the evaluation of success and failure, but it is also a principal determinant of individual initiative and social effectiveness. Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world ...’ (p. 18).

If Sen is right, the development of agentic capability is, arguably, more important than literacy and numeracy as an educational outcome. I believe that restorative practice is an educational tool which can advance this agenda. It is a tool for the promotion of social justice, understood as the capacity of citizens to engage in practical reason in situations where it is necessary to work carefully through diverse views. From this perspective, restorative practice may still be a behaviour and relationship management tool because we will always have the task of setting boundaries for our young, but it clearly offers much broader and more productive possibilities. Among these is the possibility that, if we offer respect and enquiry to those in our schools who do not appear to conform, we may find that the barriers to their achievement, in both our terms and theirs, will not be so great; and maybe there will be less need for exclusion. On this account, the primary function of what I now call RJP is not about resolving specific conflicts, but rather, about the production and maintenance of respectful relationship, which is the antithesis of colonising relationship. The success of this proposal depends as much on the capacity of those of us whose values and understandings dominate the current framework to enquire respectfully about difference, as it does on the preparedness of those who hold on to their own culture, apparently against the odds, to engage with us.

A Fundamental Shift

The proposed focus on relational practices based on respect may sound simple, but actually it calls for a fundamental shift in the way many of us in the west position ourselves in educational practice. To commit ourselves to hear our students speak and to try to understand them in their own terms is a major change in the power relationships with which much western education is imbued. In effect, this also erases the exclusionary individualised euro-western subject of education, replacing it with an interdependent, relational subject who is located within webs of relationships,

stretching back through local, national and global history. And it relocates education within a discourse of development that is not about appropriating the children of strangers and remaking them as euro-western subjects. In Aotearoa New Zealand, it could change the discursive location of the problem of ‘poor educational attainment’ by Māori, to ‘colonisation and its aftermath’.

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