

12/9/2013

Ms Rosemary Menkens MP  
Chair  
Education and Innovation Committee  
Parliament House, George Street  
BRISBANE ALD 4000

Dear Ms Menkens and Committee

I would like to take this opportunity to submit some additions to the proposed legislation Strengthening Discipline in State Schools bill.

**CONCERN** – That the current Strengthening Discipline Bill needs to be accompanied by evidence based supports for schools that are proven to lower Student Disciplinary Absences.

**EXPLANATION**

I have worked for 25 years in Education in both the public and independent sectors. The last ten years of my career I have worked in a Behaviour Support team both as a consultant and a Manager. I work with a significant proportion of low SES schools and as such am at the 'coal face' of the effects of behaviour on a school community and the effects of suspension and exclusion on the students. The schools I work in have varying degrees of suspension and exclusion however the ones that have high SDA data tend to be in low SES areas and tend to have a high level of recidivism. In short, the students who are being suspended and excluded repeatedly get suspended and excluded. This points to a concern that as a deterrent or way of changing behaviour SDA's have limited effect and in actually cause an increase in the need to suspend and exclude through the eroding of relationships and connectedness.

SDA's are also often a result of schools having no other options. This is not to say that there are no options, its more a case that schools often don't know what they don't know. They don't have any other tools in their toolbox.

The notion of using punishment as a way of achieving results in schools has long been questioned and discredited.

"Works in the short term, but loses effectiveness over time, with focus by student on avoiding punishment. Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community Kohn, 2006

Many leading educators such as Marzano (Art and Science of Teaching) focus on building positive relationships rather than punishment and find that there is a direct link between effective teaching and learning and effective relationship management in the school and classroom. Consequently schools that focus on effective relationship building systems experience less need to address high level behaviours.

Building positive relationships in the classroom and school leads to greater social and emotional competence. *"Children from families with economic disadvantage are found to demonstrate extreme developmental delays in their social-emotional competence"* (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study 2004) If students are explicitly

taught how to build and maintain good relationships and they are educated in a climate that values good relationships, they are less likely to disengage and damage people or property. This is particularly important in low SES school communities. Dr Ruby Payne's research *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* shows that communities that experience long term disadvantage develop a set of beliefs and values that prioritise among other things - relationships. Suspensions and exclusions further disengage these communities and they lose faith that the school system can address their needs. The results are that the young people are massively undereducated and unable to get jobs, this leads to young people creating their own social systems that often include crime and violence which becomes a pipeline to jail. We need to keep these young people in schools in order to avoid the enormous social costs of this pipeline.

Building connectedness to school has been researched thoroughly over the last number of decades and the evidence points to the fact that when students feel connected to their school— they are less likely to exhibit damaging behaviour to themselves or others.

*"What we have found from our research is that kids who felt connected to school . . . smoked less, drank alcohol less, had a later age of sexual debut and attempted suicide less. On top of this, from the educational literature, they do better across every academic measure we have. As our research expanded, [we learned that] this is not just an association—kids who smoke less also felt more connected to school. It is a causal relationship. There is something in that bond, in that connection to school that changes the life trajectory—at least the health and academic behavior. It is very powerful—second only to parents in power. In some contexts it's more powerful than parents."*

*Robert Blum, professor and chair,  
Department of Population and Family Health Sciences,  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (full article attached – Attachment 1)*

This is very powerful knowledge as it points the way to steering school decision making away from suspending and excluding and towards methods that build relationships and connectedness.

CASEL – an American foundation who research Social and Emotional Learning make the following points regarding school connectedness.

*1. Social and Emotional Learning enhances preparation for learning by promoting students attachment to school and developing beliefs and behaviours that lead to academic achievement. It also enhances engagement in learning and mastery of subject content through increased motivation, commitment and time spent on task. These skills result in improved attendance and graduation rates, as well as reduced suspensions ,expulsions and grade retention.*

*2. Student attachment to school is strongly influenced by the learning environment. Class and school interventions that make the learning environment safer, more caring, better managed, more participatory and that enhance students social competence have been shown to increase student attachment to school.*

The question for schools and governments regarding discipline needs to include discussion about the tools that schools use to promote pro-social behaviours and the

supports that governments can put in place to ensure that schools are resourced to access those tools.

There are some very real and viable additional tools that schools can use that will minimise SDA's and increase student engagement and learning. I would like to describe two of the most powerful ones that I have experienced, seen operating successfully, and present you some data that supports them.

The first is Restorative Practices. *"A philosophy, in action, that places the relationship at the heart of the educational experience."* Margaret Thorsborne, 2011  
*"Crime and misconduct is a violation of people and relationships. Violations create obligations and liabilities. Restorative Practice seeks to heal the harm and put things right."* Thorsborne and Blood 2005 Adapted from Zehr and Mika 1997

Restorative Practices in schools seek to teach students at a universal level social and emotional competence and to know what to do when things go wrong. How to repair damaged relationships. RP focuses on logical consequences for misconduct and promotes high expectations in a school regarding behaviour and high levels of support for students to achieve this. RP focuses on genuine accountability – *"Genuine accountability includes an opportunity to understand the human consequences of one's acts: to face up to what one has done and to whom one has done it; it also involves taking responsibility for the results of one's behaviour to be allowed and encouraged to help decide what will happen to make things right then to take steps to repair the damage"* Howard Zehr, 1990

New Zealand Education Ministry has supported the inclusion and rigorous development of Restorative Practices in schools for the previous 8-10 years. They have some surprising data that shows the success of their work. They have collected baseline data and annual data for SDA's and Achievement. This data has been collected and collated by the Ministry of Education 2012.

The suspension Data in the sample schools showed a 60% reduction in suspensions and exclusions over the pre Restorative Practices data.

The data not only indicates the reduction of the use of SDA's but also shows an increase in learning.

Nationally, the % of school leavers with level 2 or better has increased by 3.7% each year since 2005.(57% in 2005 to 74% in 2010)

In 7 schools in particular, L2+ has increased each year by an average... 10.8%  
The benefits to the students, to the schools and society in general are obvious from these statistics.

Schools and communities in United Kingdom, Canada and increasingly in other countries are taking up Restorative Practices in order to decrease suspension and exclusion and to increase learning outcomes. The following quote is from a community in Wales that have used Restorative Practices to address discipline concerns.

*"In addition, we needed to improve our attendance in schools and reduce the number of exclusions. Part of the Council's Poverty agenda is to ensure pupils are in schools and learning to improve future work prospects. We had seen how restorative practice had supported other areas to achieve this. We had also seen a significant improvement in our own Youth Offending Service, where restorative justice has reduced re-offending in the criminal system."* See attached article Swansea, Wales,

*UK, on the path to becoming a restorative city Posted by Joshua Wachtel on Sep 5, 2013 in Community, eForum News, Featured, Justice, Schools)- Attachment 2*

Restorative Practices and suspensions/exclusions are not mutually exclusive. However the systemic and embedded use of RP in schools leads to a diminished need to suspend and exclude. Systemic and consistent use of practices that connect students and families to the school create a school climate where damaging people and property is not part of "what we do here". (see attached article School Climate, the Brain and Connection to School By Chuck Saufler © 2011)

The other tool that schools can use to minimise SDA's and maximise learning particularly in low SES areas is to develop the school staffs understanding. In particular of the barriers that students and families from a poverty background experience when they enter predominantly middle class schools.

Dr Ruby Payne's research A Framework for Understanding Poverty – 2009 is a valuable resource for schools to gain some awareness on how to work with the cultural dissonance that often exists between the schools and the families from a disadvantaged background. Her work not only assists school staff to develop awareness of the needs of students but also how to enable the students to navigate the hidden rules of a middle class school and to develop the cognitive skills they often lack to access education. This naturally leads to students being able to translate their growth in skills into a future workplace. Her research is being used widely in Victoria and South Australia to assist schools to minimise high level behaviour to support positive student outcomes. It has also been used locally in Qld National Partnership schools to raise staff awareness.

If we are going to have clear standards and expectations regarding behaviour we also have to account for the wide differences in the thinking, experience and culture that comes with the students and families that come through our school doors.

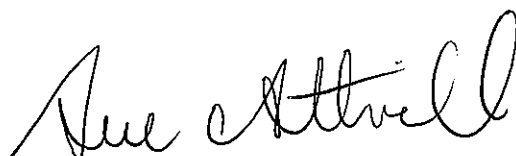
### **PROPOSAL**

Giving Principals more autonomy can also give them the freedom to use evidence based and proven strategies such as Restorative Practices and we must support them in this endeavour.

I am advocating for high standards and high levels of support. I believe that this legislation must be accompanied by support for schools to include practices that are proven to work such as Restorative Practices and the Ruby Payne research. The support needs to be real and tangible, given funding and credence through a targeted and evidence based approach. I am advocating that the State Government pilots a project similar to the NZ model to support the development of Restorative Practices and the awareness of the Ruby Payne research to assist Principals and schools. The projected outcome for this support would be to accompany high expectations of behaviour in schools with high levels of support and understanding of each school community in order to minimise Student Disciplinary Absences.

Thankyou for considering this submission.

Sue Attrill

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Attrill', written in a cursive style.

# School Climate, the Brain and Connection to School

By Chuck Saufier © 2011

*"What we have found from our research is that kids who felt connected to school . . . smoked less, drank alcohol less, had a later age of sexual debut and attempted suicide less. On top of this, from the educational literature, they do better across every academic measure we have. As our research expanded, [we learned that] this is not just an association—kids who smoke less also felt more connected to school. It is a causal relationship. There is something in that bond, in that connection to school that changes the life trajectory—at least the health and academic behavior. It is very powerful—second only to parents in power. In some contexts it's more powerful than parents."*

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Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

## School Climate

Within moments of entering a school building, we develop a “feel” for a school. How a school “feels” is influenced by a myriad of small and seemingly unimportant things. As you look around at the walls, what do you see? Are there displays of student work? Inspiring slogans on the walls? Posters announcing upcoming community and school events? Or, are the walls stark and bare except for a long list of Rules of Conduct—each beginning with the word, “Don’t”? How do students and staff respond to you as you walk down the hallway? Are you greeted with a smile? Do students and staff show interest in who you are and ask if you need help getting to your destination? Or, do they walk silently by without acknowledging your presence, trying to avoid eye contact with you.

This “feel” we experience is indicative of the school's climate. School climate has a direct effect on whether or not a student will develop a positive connection to school, which in turn protects against a wide range of risk factors in students’ lives. Students who are connected to school are *less* likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors (including drug and alcohol abuse and early sexual activity) and are *more* likely to be more successful academically and graduate from high school. The Wingspread Declaration (<http://www.jhsph.edu/bin/s/q/Septemberissue.pdf>) demonstrates that connection to school is crucial for a safe school environment and positive relationships build this connection. Connection to school by sixth grade is a protective factor that lasts throughout high school for the connected individual.

## We Respond to the Social Environment

Have you ever noticed how your mood can be influenced by others around you? Even though we might enter a room feeling pretty neutral emotionally, if the room is filled with people who are cheerful and laughing, we are more likely to feel upbeat and happy. Similarly, if we enter a room full of people who are sad or tense our mood is likely to shift to match the prevailing mood in the room. We become emotionally responsive to the affect of the people around us. This emotional responsiveness is known as “affective resonance.”

Emotional responsiveness is initially developed in the first year of life through attuned, reciprocal relationships developed with adult caretakers. We learn this emotional attunement and reciprocity from thousands of give and take, face-to-face interactions with those around us. This creates the neural patterning for future relational skills that enable us to sense if an environment or person is attuned to our needs, helps develop empathy and teaches us to sense when we may be violating social norms.

## **The Brain Automatically Assesses Situational Safety**

Our brain automatically evaluates the safety of a situation and activates the nervous system to respond with either a sense of open receptivity (reflective state of mind) or “fight, flight, or freeze” (reactive state of mind). In a reflective state of mind we are in a state of relaxed alertness and emotional calmness. The brain is in an optimal state for learning. In a reactive state of mind the brain becomes vigilant for threat, cognitive functions are depressed and learning and memory are impaired. When we are reactive, we revert to primitive behaviors without flexibility or compassion. We act impulsively and lose the ability to balance our emotions, and fail to exert moral reasoning\*. (Siegal, Mindsight p.258)

When we feel attunement and trust, we stay in that relationship and respond reciprocally. When we sense non-attunement, our brain is triggered to a state of vigilance and we scan the environment for danger. The brain chemistry of this reaction depresses our abilities to process and remember information unrelated to the issue of safety until the brain is satisfied that the danger is past. The greater the perceived threat, the more intense is the brain’s stress response. The more the brain has to focus on getting back to safety, the less capacity there is for learning and remembering academic material.

Partial responsibility for the auto-assessment of social situations rests with mirror neurons. The socially based mirror neuron system enables us to create “maps of intention”. That is, in a social setting our mind maps the intentions of others. Based upon prior experience, the brain predicts what is coming next. This has tremendous survival value for us as a socially complex species. We take in other's movements and expressions, anticipate the implications of their motor actions (including facial expressions and body language) and anticipate what will happen next. This enables our brain to prepare for an appropriate response. Every school has a climate and culture that creates in each student a set of expectations based on prior experiences that unconsciously produces either a reactive or reflective state of mind. This is the effect of the "affective resonance" of a school.

## **Affective Resonance and Connection to School**

We hear about school climate and school culture, but affective resonance? Human neurology is set up to respond to the emotional atmosphere of the social environment, its “affective resonance.” What does this have to do with school climate? Everything! School climate is a reflection of the affective resonance of a school. It is how an individual feels walking in the door of your school. Each individual has his or her own experience of a school’s climate. Is this school a safe place for me? Am I treated with respect and acceptance here? Will I be treated fairly? Do I have close relationships here? These are big issues for each student and are key factors in developing feelings of connection to school. Students’ emotional experience at school each day produces for them an emotional response to walking in the door of school and a personal response to the affective resonance they perceive. Affective resonance has the power to increase or decrease students’ feelings of connection to school depending on whether it creates a receptive or reactive state of mind in the student.

## **American Culture Affects School Culture**

It’s also important to note that school culture (“the way we do things here”) is often influenced by the larger culture of the community and the country. When we examine the models that are shaping the attitudes and behaviors of our students, we don’t have to look far to identify aspects of American culture that, if allowed to become part of our school culture, can seriously and negatively affect school climate. Some of these cognitive constructs include:

- “Us and them” thinking, demonizing the “other” side. You are my friend or my enemy, and there is no middle ground. Moderation is portrayed as weakness. Perceiving a group as

“other” is a step toward creating hatred for them. Next comes justifying violence toward the “other”.

- Revenge as legitimatizing violence. If you are my enemy then I can attack you.
- Unity at the cost of diversity. Seeing sameness (white, heterosexual, Christian majority) as unifying and representing a social “norm,” and anything different as a threat or danger. This is currently being demonstrated through the media on the issues of immigration, homosexual marriage and the proposed Islamic center near ground zero in New York City.
- Stereotypes and bias. Models are pervasive in television, movies, magazines and video games.
- Sarcasm and abusive language. Television characters are often seen being mean to each other with a laugh track as background.
- Inappropriate models for dating relationships and family roles. Sexualized adolescent behavior and dress are pervasive in media. Often children are portrayed as more mature and smarter than their parents. Mother often has to look out for dad because he is a buffoon. Children in television and movies routinely use derisive sarcasm toward their parents and peers without any consequences.
- Persistent denial and blame as a way to avoid taking responsibility and accountability for one’s actions. The cognitive process modeled here seems to be, “If I deny it vehemently enough for long enough it will go away” and/or “He made me do it.” The thinking is that someone else’s action “justifies” the unacceptable behavior and therefore absolves the actor of any responsibility.

The pervasiveness of these negative messages in all forms of media is distressing. The latest media usage data from the Kaiser Family Foundation says that eight to eighteen year olds are engaged with media including television, video games, movies, computer, music/audio and print for more than seven hours a day. This study does not include time texting on cell phones. This number climbs to more than ten hours a day if you count multi-tasking on different platforms, like doing homework while watching TV or listening to music. That’s a lot of exposure to ideas, that when repeated over time through several different mediums, change students’ attitudes and behaviors dramatically. Exposure to these messages often happens in a environment that is socially reinforcing and enjoyable, like watching TV with an older sibling, eating a favorite snack and laughing at the inappropriate models and language on the TV. These positive environmental influences add to the impact of media norms. The models seen in the media are rarely, if ever, questioned for validity or appropriateness by the young people watching them.

### **How to Counter Negative Media Models**

Cultural attitudes and behaviors derived from American culture will dominate our school culture as social norms unless we consistently model the behaviors and attitudes we want from our students, proactively, on a daily basis. Countering these negative cultural models will require planning and persistent action by adults at school in the following ways.

- We can begin by engaging the natural curiosity that students have about their brain and how it works. Teaching students how the brain learns and the importance of effort and learning from mistakes will improve individual self-efficacy.
- We can model a “zero indifference” attitude for language that is derogatory, racist, sexist, homophobic, or stereotyping by questioning students in a non-hostile manner about the effects of such language on others, even when there seems to be no hostile intention.
- We can help students learn to think critically about generalizations and stereotypes presented by the media by teaching them how to deconstruct the messages presented to

them. Building media literacy with students will give them a greater understanding of how information influences attitudes and how attitudes drive behavior.

- We can discuss with students how advertising works to target and control our beliefs about masculinity, femininity, sex roles, our bodies, race, relationships, etc. This can help students develop a sense of control over their choices.
- We can engage with students in projects creating media to promote pro-social change in our school and community, thus fostering connectedness to both.

This process should include addressing peer norms through student surveys and focus groups. All of these processes will help students to think critically about their attitudes and beliefs, and to examine the origins and validity of those norms. This can be the beginning of a process that engages students in planning and empowers them as social activists to change the peer norms at school. A restorative approach, which I explain in more detail below, supports this work; builds understanding, trust and respect; and improves student connection to peers, adults and school. It is up to us to intentionally create a positive school climate and culture every day, in order to foster a safe, welcoming and relational school that promotes academic achievement, personal growth and connection to school.

### **Brain Research Supports a Restorative Approach**

There exists a large body of evidence in the brain research field showing that attention, motivation and learning are driven and guided by emotion. These concepts apply not only to academics but also to students learning new patterns of behavior. Response To Intervention (RTI) has raised awareness for schools of the necessity to include tier one interventions that address academic learning as well as social and emotional development, sometimes referred to as “relational literacy.” Adopting a restorative approach strongly supports teaching and practicing the skills of relational literacy. A fundamental principle of the restorative approach is that relationships are central to learning and development. In a restorative school, all adults model this principle in their interactions with students **and** each other. The restorative approach focuses on **how** we act in relationships, address problems, manage discipline and resolve conflict. When we rely on genuine curiosity, empathy and caring, we help students learn and improve relational skills, while also improving their connection with us and to school.

The fundamental hypothesis in taking a restorative approach to school climate and culture is that students are happier, more cooperative, achieve more academically, and are more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than do things *to* them or *for* them. This hypothesis is supported by brain research on stress, motivation, learning, and memory explained in the following section. One of the most common questions asked by principals is, “How do we get buy-in from the staff? They are so focused on academic outcomes that they feel they don’t have time to deal with climate or behavioral issues”. One approach to getting buy-in from staff is to address the brain research showing the effects of different school environments.

The following chart illustrates the impact of school climate on the brain by cross-referencing school environments with low to high boundaries and limits with low to high nurturance and support.



## Impact of Social Environments on the Brain

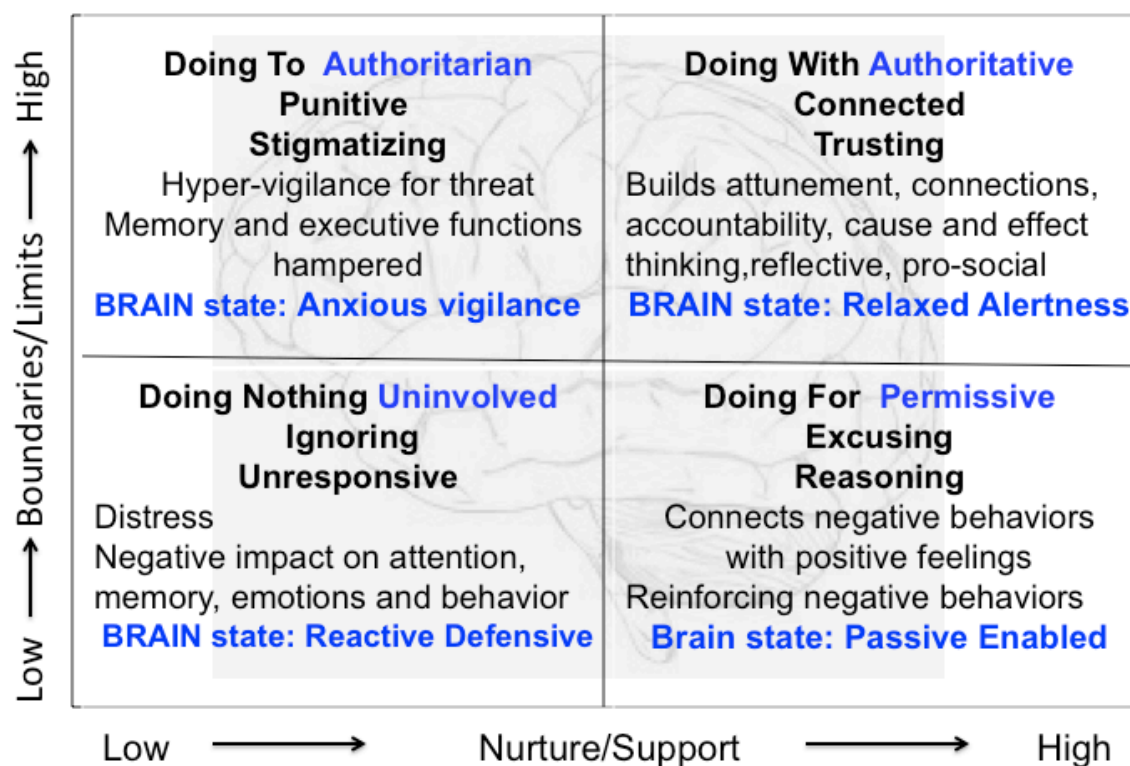


Chart is modified from Diana Baumrind's parenting research

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### Low Structure and Low Support

As shown in the chart above, providing low structure and low support in an uninvolved school climate produces an environment unsupportive of developing caring relationships. Negative emotions like fear produce trigger a reactive and defensive state in the brain. In a school where this is the cultural norm students can become depressed and hyper-vigilant regarding their own safety, which reduces their ability to develop close relationships, focus on academics, and remember material learned in class. Forming a positive connection to school is very difficult in this environment.

### Low Structure and High Support

The low structure and high support *permissive* school climate is characterized by adults who, upon seeing a student break a rule, respond by telling the student what they did wrong, why it was wrong, how it affected other people, what to do the next time instead, and then giving a warning that next time there will be a consequence. The adult does all the work concerning the student's misbehavior while the student waits for the adult to finish and then goes on his/her way. Because students are passive observers in these situations, they do not engage in cognitive reflection on their behavior or its effects on others. This type of adult-student interaction relieves the students of any responsibility for their own behavior and keeps them from developing and practicing alternative positive behaviors. This creates a passive and enabled brain state. Misbehavior is relatively easy in this environment because there is no accountability. Negative behaviors produce good feelings for students, which reinforce the behavior as positive and something to repeat in the future.

### **High Structure and Low Support**

The high structure and low support *authoritarian* climate is characterized by adults who use an authoritarian style. Adults blame and stigmatize “rule breakers,” making it difficult for them to make pro-social changes. This type of school climate often produces a distress response from students. In this climate, executive and memory functions are dampened, leading to negative effects on learning and behavior. The human brain in this environment tends toward a state of anxious vigilance. Students must use part of their brain to constantly scan for threats in the environment, which contributes to fewer social connections and lower academic achievement.

### **High Structure and High Support**

The high structure and high support *authoritative* climate engages students co-operatively and collaboratively. The human brain in this environment is in a calm and attentive state and is capable of reflective thought. When misbehavior is handled with a positive toned restorative discussion with students, empathy for others and taking responsibility for one’s own behavior become positive actions to be repeated. Trust is built with adults and the connection to school as a positive institution is improved. This environment creates optimal learning conditions in the brain.

### **Connection to School is Important**

The Wingspread Declaration and supporting research has clearly demonstrated the importance of connection and bonding to school. A restorative approach sets and maintains a positive social environment even in times of stress or conflict. Students seeking connection will find it easier to establish connections in a school with a positive affective resonance. Adults who are consistently proactive in modeling a positive emotional tone and responding quickly and effectively to situations of peer aggression ensure students of a safe environment. School climate affects everyone.

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*Chuck Saufler currently works as a trainer/consultant for Safe Schools for All and Restorative School Practices of Maine. He can be reached at [csaufler@safeschoolsforall.com](mailto:csaufler@safeschoolsforall.com)*

# Swansea, Wales, UK, on the path to becoming a restorative city

Posted by [Joshua Wachtel](#) on Sep 5, 2013 in [Community](#), [eForum News](#), [Featured](#), [Justice](#), [Schools](#)



Hilary Davies, the restorative practices project manager for the city and county of Swansea, Wales, UK, wrote the following post to discuss the region's efforts to become a restorative city.

***"It'll change your life, it'll change you!"***

These are the opinions of Chelsea who was excluded from two comprehensive schools due to bad behaviour resulting in her being moved to a pupil referral unit. As the only girl out of 13 boys in the class, she found this tough, and there were times when she'd 'kick off' and retreat to the corner of the class. Following the training the staff received in Restorative Practice (RP), her form tutor, already passionate about using the approach, started using the question cards to deal with disputes in the class. Chelsea took to this immediately. Throughout the last few years, whenever there had been conflict in her mainstream school it had resulted in raised voices and anger between herself and staff, which achieved nothing more than her walking away frustrated about not being heard. Using RP and having an opportunity to talk about what happened has been a turning point in her attitude. She has consequently written to both headteachers of the schools she previously attended to apologise for her behaviour, describing how she now understands the impact her behaviour has had on others. Her story is very clear and sad, as she truly believes that if a restorative approach had been used in her mainstream schools she might still be there with her friends sitting exams and getting her qualifications, which is her desire but sadly not an option at present.

Training the Pupil Referral Unit is part of the city and county of Swansea's journey to becoming a restorative city. The work began in March 2010 with the formation of a Prevention & Early Intervention board consisting of representatives from Education,

Police, Social Services and the Voluntary Sector, chaired by Richard Parry, Lead Director for Children and Young People. The board agreed to introduce Restorative Practice, as we needed additional tools to help schools deal with behaviour issues. There were also a high number of referrals being received by our child and family services, which were mostly low level problems that were considered could be dealt with as they occurred, thereby preventing the escalation to other services. It was recognised that many of these were in relation to bad behaviour, and a decision was made by the Lead Director for Children & Young People to adopt the approach initially to schools in areas with the highest level of deprivation.

In addition, we needed to improve our attendance in schools and reduce the number of exclusions. Part of the Council's Poverty agenda is to ensure pupils are in schools and learning to improve future work prospects. We had seen how restorative practice had supported other areas to achieve this. We had also seen a significant improvement in our own Youth Offending Service, where restorative justice has reduced re-offending in the criminal system.

As the Project Manager I have led the work since the start and worked closely with the '[International Institute for Restorative Practices Europe](#)' (formerly IIRP UK & Ireland) during this time. Although initially engaging some heads to come on board was a challenge, the project has grown from strength to strength and by June 2013, 56% of all schools have been trained and approximately 4,500 staff trained across the authority in schools and supporting teams working with children and young people. We chose to use the International Institute for Restorative Practices, as we liked their sound theory-based approach and their explicit model, and we were fortunate in having the experienced Police Officer and RP trainer David Williams working in the YOS team in Swansea. That partnership has allowed us to seconde him to support our roll-out.



Officer David Williams facilitating a restorative circle

What we didn't anticipate was the demand we experienced for training. People recognised that there is enormous benefit with RP in developing relationships, in every setting and with all ages. The project has developed significantly since the start,

as we constantly review and refine our model by building on its success, and identifying new ways of maintaining good practice and spreading into the community.

Some of the ways we have achieved this is by offering additional training opportunities. We begin with a whole school approach using the basic “Introduction to RP” training. We then offer advanced and circle training to a selection of staff who become the Guiding Team and cascade this to other colleagues. Last year we started training pupils in the school to become RP Mentors and that has made a huge difference in helping schools embed the approach. To date there are approx 400 pupils trained across the schools with more training arranged for the next year. Children are aware of their rights as many of our schools are Rights Respecting and will respectfully challenge staff if RP is not used at the appropriate time. Both approaches support each other well, as restorative practice sits under Article 12 (right to be heard) and Article 19 (right to be safe).

We have also developed a robust support model, which we feel is critical. This is a significant change programme for some, although the majority of people working with children and young people are already working in a restorative way. Our approach includes supporting schools prior to training to ensure that they understand what’s involved and that staff and pupils are aware of what’s being introduced. During training we ensure that role plays are pertinent to the audience, which helps them put what’s learnt into practice immediately. Following training, we re-visit at different stages to provide advice and look at how it’s being implemented and communicated, and we discuss further training opportunities.

In the schools we are witnessing quieter classes, staff who feel more engaged and a reduction in parents visiting the Headteacher with complaints in relation to pupils interacting with their children. Hearing the pupils talk openly about their problems and seeing how empathetic they are with each other has been really emotional at times, but enormously rewarding. Schools using RP have a different atmosphere now, children are calmer and happier and enjoy coming to school and this has contributed to improved attendance in schools trained in the first phase.

Some of our more recent work has been about raising awareness that RP is not just for schools that have bad behaviour or issues. We have many establishments with excellent well-being already in place, and RP has further enhanced that and again ensured consistency across staff. We’re delighted that Estyn (the Office for Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education & Training in Wales) is recognising the value of using RP in many of our schools, and one of our comprehensive schools was recently seen as sector leading in using RP to support well-being. We also hold network events that provide opportunities to promote RP and for people to share good practice. On 15th October, 2013, we are holding the first RP Pupil Conference, where trained children and young people will come together from primary and secondary schools to share how RP has benefited them. The event will also provide opportunities for the youth to contribute to future pupil training development and the formation of an RP Pupil consultation group.

Though our initial focus was on schools, since we started our roll-out we have always provided training opportunities for other teams who work with children and young people. This has supported the consistency in language and behaviour, along with

people working more with each other across sectors. Teams are using restorative approaches as part of their regular meetings, particularly the problem-solving techniques, and staff in schools and non-schools check-in just like the pupils, which has contributed to improved relationships. The majority of people working with children and young people are already working in a restorative way but sometimes the consistency is lacking and restorative practice provides the framework for improving that.

The continuation for developing RP in Swansea is limitless. We have already trained hundreds in the community and this will continue. We are working closely with Swansea Metropolitan University to include RP in the teacher training programme for Primary and Secondary students, which will mean that the newly qualified teachers would be going into schools with this added skillset to manage behaviour.

We have just begun trialling training for parents in one of our communities and this will be continued across all areas, along with more Governors training and awareness raising. Already these parents feel more confident and their self esteem has improved; they are keen to undertake the advanced training. We also aim to have restorative practice included in all job descriptions and to become a core training requirement for those working with children and young people.

We believe that a major factor in our success is in having the support for RP at the top of our organisation, by our chief executive, cabinet members, director and heads of service. Similarly, in the most successful schools the headteacher and senior management teams are the drivers. They constantly champion the approach and include it in other aspects of school life, such as lesson planning.

A few years on, we are being asked to share our journey and work with others, which is rewarding, as we are passionate about sharing RP across Wales and beyond. A film capturing some of our journey will be released mid-October and will be available to purchase through the IIRP. With the focus on Poverty and Prevention, and the use of Restorative Practice and inclusive tools such as Family Learning Signature to support this work, the prospects for change are good.

We hope that Restorative Practice will make a difference for everyone in some way. For those who have more significant life challenges, we hope it will make all the difference and contribute to giving them a better quality of life.

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