Dealing with incidents at schools using Restorative Practices[1]

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Abstract: Developing social coherence creates an effective protective factor for social health. Two trends in modern day society have a negative effect on the growth of social responsibility of our young people: Individualisation and changing family structures. Social education is shifting from being a family affair to not being dealt with at all. Schools typically find themselves dealing with a growing number of incidents and are being forced into the role of educating our youth in socially appropriate behaviour. The zero-tolerance approach and punishing of offenders does not reduce the number nor the severity of incidents. Restorative practices is an effective alternative to the traditional punitive approach. In the restorative view zero-tolerance is not enough. Offenders need to gain insight into the consequences of their actions and need to take an active role in repairing the harm they have incurred. Often this harm is more in the social and relational realm than material. The restorative approach provides a practical strategy that allows both offenders and their victims to gain insight into each other's experience, to understand the consequences of their behaviour and to find ways to ensure that the damage is repaired. The basic ingredient is that victim and offender together develop a solution, thereby increasing their own problem-solving capacity and thus the ability to cooperate. Social coherence does not mean we all need to like each other, yet we do need to create a safe environment so that we feel free to cooperate with one another.

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Introduction

It is overly evident that society has undergone major transformations in the past few centuries. These transformations have brought many advantages such as a longer lifespan and more possibilities for individual choice and development. But what is society and what is the place of the individual in this society? Abstractly speaking, society could be seen as a regulating process, a number of explicit and implicit codes of conduct which make situations more predictable for individuals, thereby reducing fear so that they have a sense of control, of safety. Emotions and the regulation of the expression of these emotions (in terms of concrete behaviour) play an important role. An incident then generally refers to a situation where an individual (or a group of individuals) has transgressed these (implicit and explicit) rules for appropriate behaviour.

Before the Second World War, society was primarily a formalised affair. A definite hierarchy and distance of power between the echelons of this hierarchy created clear lines of authority and an emotional distance between individuals. After the Second World War a process of *informalisation* gave rise to today's society (Wouters, 1990). Ideally this trend would reduce the emotional distance between individuals, leading to a more egalitarian society. The leading principle is that individuals learn to exercise self-control, rather than having rules externally enforced on them by social control. So, society wants of the individuals of which it is constituted that they behave appropriately from their own inner convictions. The process to reach this goal is called socialisation, generally the responsibility of the primary caregivers of the new additions to society - our children.

Family structures reflect to a certain extent societal structures. Since the Second World War caregivers have become more aware of their own needs and emotions and those of their children. Egalitarian relationships between family members are more important than previously, the distance in power is reduced and family members tend to interact more informally with each other. This is only a general trend and families find themselves somewhere on a dimension between a so-called *command* household on the one extreme to a *negotiation* household on the other extreme (de Bakker, 2006). In the command household, children are expected to obey their care-givers. Disobedience is not tolerated and is punished. In the negotiation household decisions are made by consensus. This requires more than a mere smattering of social skills and the premise that family members fully take each other's needs and feelings into account.

Neither extreme is ideal. Laying down the law is simple for the parent, yet not pleasant for the child. Negotiating *every* point is also not tenable. After all, care-givers are responsible for their charges. The very nature of this responsibility implies a distance in power. When push comes to shove, the care-giver must decide. The power aspect is but one dimension. Baumrind (1978) and later Maccoby & Martin (1983) defined four parenting styles on the basis of two dimensions: demanding – undemanding versus responsive – unresponsive (see table 1).

	demanding	**undemanding**
responsive	authoritative	permissive
unresponsive	authoritarian	neglectful

Table 1. Four parenting styles according to Baumrind (1978) and Maccoby & Martin (1983)

The authoritarian parenting style needs little explanation. Expectations are high and obedience demanded. The level of informality is low, fixed rules are laid down by the caregiver and are enforced via punishment and reward. Generally emotions are not openly expressed.

In the permissive parenting style emotions are paramount and openly expressed. Everything is open for discussion and the child is given a high degree of autonomy. Caregivers provide loads of support and unconditional positive regard. Effort is rewarded, yet expectations are low or absent. Maccoby & Martin (1983) refer to this style as indulgent, rather than permissive.

The primary characteristic of the neglectful parenting style is a failure in the communication between caregiver and child. This can be due to a lack of social skills or because the child successfully rebels against an authoritarian parenting style (Torrance, 1998). Emotions generally are not expressed (or are inadequately expressed) and expectations are low to non-existent. *Laissez faire* would best summarise this parenting style.

In the authoritative parenting style rules play an important role, yet to a degree these rules are negotiated between caregiver and child. The caregiver attempts to explain his or her wishes and tries to get the child to agree to the rule voluntarily. Norms and values are important as is own responsibility and autonomy, yet all within certain limits. Emotions are openly expressed and expectations are high. According to Maccoby (1992) the authoritative parenting style tends to result in children who are happy, capable and successful.

In summary it would seem that an authoritative parenting style is the most beneficial.

Another side-effect of societal informalisation is the primacy given to individualism. Certainly there are many advantages for the individual, yet there are also some downsides. One is that individuals become more egocentric and more egotistical. Material well-being becomes more important, leaving less time and energy for relational well-being. Traditional family structures are challenged: a higher divorce rate, newly constituted families, single-parent families, care-givers who work full-time to name but a few.

Intergenerational living, or at least grandparents in the vicinity is also ever less the norm. Increased mobility makes that family bonds are looser than they were of old and nuclear families need largely to be self-supporting.

Du Bois-Reymond (2006) distinguishes between an *open* and a *closed* family climate concerning conflict management. In an open-minded family negotiation is the leading strategy to deal with different interests and expectations, where caregivers and young people encounter each other as equal parties. In a closed family climate conflicts are suppressed and thus avoided from being openly discussed. Either party may prevent conflicts from arising in the first place by complying with the other's interests and suppressing their own interests. In Europe and especially in south-eastern Europe du Bois-Reymond found persisting gender roles: The mother typically takes the main load of communication inside the family and plays a decisive role in conflict situations. Her strategy is typically more oriented towards finding an acceptable compromise than insisting on parental wishes. Fathers on the other hand typically withdraw from confrontation as much as possible. Her research

confirms that conflict avoidance strategies are generally more typical between mothers and daughters than fathers and sons. To summarise du Bois-Reymond's research in terms of this subject: The key term in dealing with difference of interests seems to lie in the word *avoidance*.

Parents are not to blame for "not bringing up their children properly". The point is that their task has become an order of magnitude more difficult, whilst society does not provide them with any additional tools to deal with these challenges. After all, parents are expected "naturally" to acquire parenting skills, no-one asks you to get a college degree in parenting before having children! The dynamic nature of political and societal change also brings the necessary challenges.

The extra demands on today's children and youth should not be underestimated either. Technology has brought many boons. But what is the effect of social media, for example? Even if you burp you need to post that important information on Facebook straight away… Many interactions between youths are now digital and thereby also less visible. Smart phones with internet connections, the internet, 24 hour a day television entertainment, too many choices, information overload. Is it strange that some of our youth just "give up" and allow themselves to be entertained all day, vanish behind their computers, don't leave their rooms if they can help it? Does this play a role in the "social fabric" of our society?

Against this background there remains one realm in which society can play a meaningful and essential role - schools. Teachers are trained professionals. The chance is not unimaginable that a youth at secondary school spends more contact hours with his or her teachers than with any other adult population. By the nature of their job teachers have social skills. If teachers can harness their capabilities into a coordinated approach to dealing with incidents at school, fitting with an authoritative educational style, the meaning of relationship, dependence, independence and interdependence will deepen for our youth. The effects will reach far beyond the boundaries of the school grounds.

Theoretical considerations

Despite the advancements in (developmental) psychology and pedagogics, society itself is still dominated by the "old culture" of authoritarianism. If you commit an offence, the police will investigate who is to blame, isolate you, take you to court where a judge will find you guilty and mete out a penalty. In brief: if you break a rule, you will be punished. Basic behavioural psychology teaches that of all the reinforcement strategies you can use to alter behaviour, punishment is the least effective.

According to John Blad (2008), Associate Professor Criminal law at *Erasmus University* Rotterdam, six criteria need to be fulfilled for punishment to be effective:

1. A fixed punishment system with fixed tariffs per offence
2. Sufficient knowledge about what is forbidden and the sanction per offence
3. Actors who are both rational and calculating
4. All actors make the same calculations
5. The chance of being prosecuted is high
6. All actors are fully aware of the above.

He deduces that as the severity of the offence increases, ever less of the above criteria are fulfilled.

Schools generally work along the same lines. There are rules. When an incident occurs, school personnel investigate, find the guilty party and an appropriate sanction is imposed. Just look at the statistics. Has the number of incidents at schools increased or decreased? Has the severity of incidents stayed the same? Aren't the most of the offenders also the reoffenders?

Aha. Schools aren't being tough enough. They need to implement a policy of zero tolerance. They install metal detectors at the entrance and become stricter in policing the rules. Just look at the statistics again (American Psychological Association, 2008). Has the number of incidents at schools increased or decreased? How about the severity of incidents? Aren't the most of the offenders still the reoffenders?

So, if punishment is so ineffective, why do we insist on sticking to this paradigm? Or are we just slow learners?

Perhaps we simply aren't being tough enough. It is not the underlying principle of *zero tolerance* that is at fault, but how we implement it. I break a rule I get sent home, vanish upstairs and spend the day behind my computer. This is really tough! If my parents find out, they will lecture me. The lecture about my future may be true, but it doesn't interest me right now. I cannot and do not want to look so far ahead. It goes in one ear and out the other. After a half an hour they stop anyway. This is really tough.

Somewhere we are missing some important points:

a) If we want *different* behaviour, this new behaviour will need to be learned. What do we know about the learning process and effective learning strategies? How can we creatively harness this knowledge and develop skills that will support the learning process?
b) How do we create a learning environment? To learn new behaviour, *opportunities* for learning need to be provided.
c) The old paradigm is to isolate and punish. Our attitude towards incidents is negative. We want to avoid incidents because they make us feel bad. Isolation actually means avoidance and avoidance directly opposes the possibility to learn. By avoiding, the unwanted symptom is temporarily treated so that we no longer need to deal with the discomfort it gives us. The underlying problem remains unresolved. Therefore a *new attitude* towards incidents is required.
d) What about the victims? Have their emotions been satisfactorily dealt with? Yes, of course those affected are comforted. Yet are their questions answered when an offender is sent home? Are they any less concerned about meeting their perpetrators the next time at school? Somehow we need to *integrate* the incident, the perpetrator and those affected by it so that questions are answered, issues become visible and relationships between people are restored inasmuch that is possible.

Avoidance

What do we know about learning processes? Avoiding issues only makes matters worse. So yes, zero tolerance in that sense of the word. Every incident and all inappropriate behaviour must be addressed.

Avoidance prevents learning. Take anxiety, for example. Say I am scared of heights; I cannot look down from the second floor to the ground below. The psychologist *telling* me my anxiety is irrational is not enough, even if I agree that it is irrational. It doesn't change how I feel about actually going to the second floor and looking down, I am still scared that I will feint. I therefore do not go to the second floor: I avoid having to deal with my anxiety. Does avoiding my fear solve the problem? No. In fact avoiding it keeps it neatly installed.

The therapeutically effective ingredient in helping me deal with this anxiety is exposure: By facing what is feared a different outcome is *experienced*. That which I was afraid would happen didn't happen. I go to the second floor, my heart is throbbing at my throat, I look down and I am still scared. After 10 minutes my heartbeat slows down, I still haven't feinted. Bottom line: Talking isn't the effective ingredient, *experience* is. This means that to teach different behaviour we will need to provide an opportunity to *experience* something different.

The role of emotions in the learning process

Related to this point is the role of emotions in the learning process. If I am indifferent to what is to be learnt, my motivation to actually learn is minimal. Tomkins (in Sarafino, 2002) puts it more abstractly: Humans wish to maximise positive and minimise negative affect. Tomkins (1981) posits nine innate affects, biologically wired and evolutionary adapted responses peculiar to the human being: interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear, anger, distress, shame, contempt and disgust, which he has empirically deduced by discriminating distinct sets of facial, vocal, respiratory, skin and muscle responses. He sees emotion as being a complex response, which he calls a script, based on (learned) sequences of affects experienced during certain events. His broad yet intricate affect and script theories provide one of the most complete bio-psycho-social personality theories and is the basis of, amongst others, Izard's Differential Emotions Theory (Tomkins, 1981). The main point for this paper is that affect is a necessary ingredient for the development of scripts and therefore for learning. The intensity of the affects experienced influence both the urgency and the depth to which that which is learned is rooted.

Of particular interest when considering the restorative approach is the role of shame. Intuitively, we know that an ashamed person behaves differently to an unashamed one and that behaviour in any form is the result of some decision-making process. But what precisely is the effect of shame on decision-making? Bagozzi, Verbeke, and Gavino (2003) propose that the automatic, involuntary aspects of shame interrupt smoothly functioning behaviour and put self-regulatory processes in motion to restore positive affect, or to protect the person experiencing shame. Nathanson's (1996) *Compass of Shame* suggests that we either accept that which the shame has uncovered -and adjust our views accordingly-, or we use one of four highly scripted defensive responses: Attack the other, attack ourselves, avoid or withdraw. So when we confront an offender with his or her inappropriate

behaviour, we may expect that this leaves him or her with a bad feeling or some feeling of shame (even if it is only the shame of having been caught!).

In the "old" regime, punishment is less effective simply because the offender is indifferent to it or is dealing with the "bad feeling" by using one of the defensive responses. The defensive response to the bad emotion can even work counterproductively: "Look how cool I am, I get suspended and I walk away with a smile on my face". The one with the choked up emotions is the victim! And what do we teach the victim by ignoring him or her? In the punishment context the perpetrator experiences minimal shame towards those affected and is likely to deal with the bad feeling towards the "punisher" with the defensive response "attack other": The stupid *#!** suspended me.

To sum up: Shame occurs in a social context. Thus the decisions made by the shamed person will directly affect his or her social behaviour. The decision made (consciously or otherwise) falls into the following categories: Accept the shame experience or protect the self. To support the learning process an environment needs to be provided in which the "bad feeling" is not avoided, but accepted. This provides motivation for change via the mechanism of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1956). If I feel bad towards those I have wronged and I accept this, I will be more likely to want to make amends.

Modelling and role models

How about Bandura's social learning theory (1977)? We learn not only by doing, but also by observing others. And the higher the status of the observed other, the more we will want to copy that behaviour. Why else do we ask George Clooney to appear in a coffee commercial? By not dealing adequately with incidents, by not really resolving them, we are reinforcing the role models as they currently are. If we want different behaviour generally, we need new role models. Behaviour causes some form of reaction (even non-reaction is a reaction). Also our behaviour has a reaction as result. So if we want different behaviour, we too will need to behave differently.

Attitude

Perhaps the most important aspect is attitude. A different attitude towards incidents is required.

- Firstly acceptance: Given the challenges of today's society it may be expected that where a great number of youngsters (sometimes more than a thousand) gather, incidents WILL occur.
- Secondly: This incident happens *in* our community. It is therefore *a part of* our community. Banishing it is not going to solve the problem, so we will need to *engage* it.
- Thirdly: Something has happened inside our community and that has created some form of damage, if nothing else there is always damage to the relationships between people. Something needs to be done to fix the damage.
- Lastly: We now have an ideal opportunity for a *learning* experience. We need only engage the perpetrator, the victim, what happened and how to fix it and integrate this all so that everyone feels OK again.

In brief: an incident is an opportunity for learning.

The last point: If experience is beneficial to the learning process, the role of the teacher dealing with the incident needs to change. Instead of telling how to solve the issue, those involved are allowed to discover for themselves - *experience* by themselves - how issues can be resolved. In essence this is the philosophical difference between teaching and learning. The teacher's role in dealing with an incident changes to leading the process, to becoming a facilitator. Now we are talking about our youth learning about problem solving capacities. Not just perpetrators, also victims and bystanders. And guess how you feel about yourself when you know you have the ability to solve problems…

Practical implementation

The practical implementation of the above considerations is called: Restorative Practices in Schools.

Restorative practices has its roots in the justice system in New Zealand (Consedine, 1995; Maxwell, 1996). The aboriginal people saw a great deal of their youth sliding into criminality and the Western justice system seemed to have little impact in changing their behaviour, leave alone deal with the effects on their welfare. From this concern the Maori people suggested that their delinquent youths could be dealt with more effectively using traditional methods.

In the old Maori tradition problems in the community were approached as follows: All those involved, including their complete families, were called together to find a solution. The issue would not be put before an elder or a judge. Especially the involvement of the families was regarded as essential. The group thus formed would withdraw, taking with them food and drink and only returned once they had reached an agreement with which all were satisfied. If necessary such a session could take days.

The government agreed to try out this method. It proved so successful that the 'Children, Youth and Families Act' was passed in New Zealand in 1989. It gave all children and adolescents, irrespective their heritage, the right to such a process. As a result Family Group Conferencing became the standard approach to deal with youth delinquency.

In the USA two bold teachers, Ted and Susan Wachtel, started applying these principles in schools for delinquents. These are schools with children who have problems and who are problematic to be dealt with in the "traditional" school setting. From their "SaferSanerSchools" (see http://www.safersanerschools.org/) principle grew the International Institute for Restorative Practices (http://www.iirp.edu) and the principles of restorative practices broadened into several social arenas. Also "ordinary" schools were having difficulty in dealing with unwanted behaviour and the principles of restorative practices were translated for this setting.

The author came into contact with Restorative Practices in the Netherlands (www.Eigen-Kracht.nl), where he spent some ten years facilitating Family Group Conferences, mainly for families having some kind of difficulty with their children and who needed the assistance of the Dutch Child Protection Agency. Simultaneously he worked as a teacher, trainer and psychologist and in this capacity was approached by a large secondary school in Arnhem. This school had the foresight that they did not want to *deal* with aggression, but wanted to prevent it. They realised that this would only be possible if they changed the *climate* in the school. Restorative Practices at Schools fitted perfectly with this idea.

Not a project

The first point to realise is that Restorative Practices is not a project. It is not really a method either. It is more an attitude, a way of being. This means that for meaningful change it is not the teachers who need to change but the *attitude* of the entire school. All personnel from the school director to the cleaning staff need to hold a restorative attitude. In fact the experience is that teachers often already apply many techniques that fit well in the restorative approach. Teachers need to be made aware of the strategies they already use and learn to apply them more consciously, more deliberately, more creatively, more consistently and in an environment that supports their interventions.

Let's get down to details. A school is a place for learning and learning of the scholarly subjects cannot really occur effectively unless there is a satisfactory learning environment, or climate. This means that relationships between people need in a general sense to be supportive and positive. This does not mean everyone needs to like each other. It does mean there is sufficient mutual respect to be able to cooperate with one another. Simply put: All unacceptable behaviour needs to be addressed. This is fully in accordance with the principle of zero tolerance.

How to address inappropriate behaviour

Instead of isolating the perpetrator and taking on the role of police officer, all individuals involved are brought together. What follows is a structured conversation where the teacher takes on the role of facilitator. The perpetrator is asked the following questions:

1. What happened?
2. How did you think about it at the time?
3. How do you think about it now?
4. Who do you think was affected and how were they affected?

The facilitator does not involve him- or herself in the content of the answer. Remember, it is not about being a good detective; the guilt question need not be answered! Simply ask the question and allow the perpetrator to explain his or her behaviour, motivations and thoughts to all involved. Now each individual who was affected is asked:

1. What happened?
2. What did you think when (you realised) it happened?
3. How do you think about it now?
4. What was the hardest part for you?

After this comes the negotiation between those involved, using questions such as:

1. What needs to be done to make things right?
2. What do you think about that?

Again, the facilitator does not get involved with the content. It doesn't matter if *you* think their plan is too hard, or too soft, or unrealistic. This is something *they* need to find out by their own experience. You simply summarise the plan and make an appointment to meet up again, in a week,

say, to evaluate how things are going. If the plan really is not effective this is the moment at which *they* can make adjustments. Also during this follow-up your opinion does not count.

Scalable

For the purposes of this paper, this is necessarily a simplified helicopter view of the practical implementation. The intervention can be scaled from a simple one-on-one to a fully blown conference in which family, friends and other members of the broader social network of all involved are also invited. The scale of the intervention needs to be appropriate to the incident's impact. Discussions between teachers, teams, support staff and management need to lay down clear guidelines so that the school as a whole applies the restorative approach in a consistent and coordinated way.

Investment and change management

One of the points that need to be addressed is the up-front investment in time. Management should be aware that climate change does not occur overnight. Not all staff will be pleased with the idea of doing things differently and in the beginning phase resistance will need to be dealt with adequately. An expert on change management can help the school make a smoother transition.

After six months there should be a noticeable difference, after a year the climate starts to change permanently. This means a big up-front investment, especially because *all* inappropriate behaviour needs to be addressed. Teaching is halted whenever an incident occurs and if at all possible is dealt with straight away. In other words lessons and rosters will get disrupted. But how can you teach properly if the environment for teaching is not present in the first place? The investment pays itself off manifold once climate change starts to take hold.

A warning is also in its place: Beware of the honeymoon effect. Once changes start to manifest there is a tendency to slack off. Changing the climate is one thing, but it needs maintenance. Slacking off generally means that new behaviour doesn't stabilise and slowly the school slips back into its old patterns. Once change sets in, stay vigilant.

Effective ingredients

Let us get back to the ground plan of the intervention and discuss why it works.

1. Participation is voluntary. Not entirely, as participation in a so-called class circle is obligatory if the student wants to return to the class. Bluntly put: Participate or get out. Condition for re-entry is to participate in a class circle. The fact remains that the student does have a choice and the message transmitted is that choices have consequences. In practice students will choose the path of least resistance. They think about which path will cost them the least effort and seldom choose not to participate.
2. The guilt question is avoided as it is not really relevant. By finding a guilty party judgement is passed on the person, whereas it is the behaviour that needs to be addressed. The facilitator taking a neutral position reduces the chance of a defensive reaction. Another side-effect of this attitude is that those involved do not need to convince the facilitator about their side of the story. This means they are more likely to start talking *with* each other, which is exactly

what is desirable: All those involved should get insight into each other's behaviour, thoughts, feelings and motivations.

3. The first question is purely factual. What happened? Yet it is more than that, it is also a chance to blow off steam, to vent the underlying emotion (often frustration).
4. The second question runs seamlessly into asking about the motivation on the side of the perpetrator. Often already now victims find out that the act was not directed at them *personally*. They just happened to be there. Note also that none of the questions ask directly about feelings or emotions. This is deliberate: To ask people to share their feelings means they need to make themselves vulnerable, which is difficult in a situation which is stressful or when your feelings have just been hurt. Especially teenagers tend to shut themselves off when you ask them directly about their feelings. Yet asking what they think is not threatening. In telling what they think they express all the underlying emotions. In brief: It is not necessary to ask directly about feelings, the nature of the questions will illicit ample expression of the underlying emotions.
5. The first two questions have the effect of venting the emotion that is connected with the incident, which is now in the past. Venting the emotions is necessary to make space for other, more positive and functional emotions. The third question moves the situation from the past into the here-and-now. It is quite possible that in the heat of the moment the perpetrator's motivations were quite different to what they are now. Sometimes a spontaneous apology is given.
6. The question about who was affected and in what way is already a first step towards gaining insight into the consequences of what happened.
7. The focus then shifts to how others, especially those directly affected, experienced the incident. In essence the questions have the same build-up and purpose (venting of emotion, shift from past to here-and-now), with the exception of the question about the hardest part of the incident. Its specific purpose is to focus on what is really important. Being confronted with information of how your behaviour has negatively affected another generally leads to a feeling of shame, or at minimum an uncomfortable feeling about your own functioning. A natural tendency is to avoid the subject and one of the avoidance strategies used is to change the subject, or to focus on some minor aspect, which is less threatening and not the most important issue.
8. In the negotiation the focus moves towards the future. How amends can be made can apply to material damage. Usually the most important aspect is how the mutual relationship can be "repaired" to the extent that those involved are able to cooperate or collaborate together in the future.

   The trap for the facilitator is to get involved in the content of the negotiation. To really *learn* from the incident both the perpetrator and those affected need more than insight into each other's behaviour and experience. If we take Kolb's learning cycle (1984), for example, the insight is the result of reflection which needs to be followed through. First into a theory: Ideas on how to fix things, leading to a plan. Then concrete action, which leads to an experience. Reflection on this experience will either give reward (on success) or the chance to adjust.

   If we deny those involved the opportunity to come up with their *own* plan, we deny them the

possibility to make amends from within themselves. In psychological terms the locus of control needs to shift to an *internal* locus of control (Wade & Travis, 1999). If the facilitator gets involved, the locus of control shifts externally. Also the reward (in this case the feeling of competence at having successfully fixed something) then shifts from intrinsic to extrinsic. Stable behavioural change is most pervasive when the new behaviour comes to be from an internal locus of control and the rewards are intrinsic.

It goes a step further. By not getting involved we are communicating our implicit trust: We expect that our students are capable of solving their own problems. Expectation is usually confirmed through a process called the self-fulfilling prophecy. Communicating our trust also means unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957), the intrinsic value of the person remains intact and that the *behaviour* is what needs to be adjusted.

So what is our role when we see parties making a plan we think is unrealistic? We allow them the experiment. Irrespective our opinion of the agreements they have made, we make an appointment to evaluate how the plan is going. Let the students realise for *themselves* when their plans are unworkable or unrealistic. Subsequently let them think for *themselves* how their agreements need to be adjusted. We allow Kolb's learning cycle to continue whereby the students further develop their problem solving capacities. The net result is that students develop a feeling of self-efficacy coupled with an internal locus of control. The knowledge that they have the capabilities within themselves to address and repair whatever mistakes are made is beneficial for mental health generally and leads to happier people.

To summarise: The ground plan of the intervention fits well with current theories and practice, both in the educational field as in the (clinical) psychological field, which is specialised in behavioural change.

The results will not be discussed at length in this paper, other than to refer readers to the websites of SaferSanerSchools and the International Institute for Restorative Practices. Suffice it to say that those schools that have embraced the restorative approach have seen a remarkable decrease in the number of punitive measures taken (such as suspensions) and a safer, friendlier and more supportive climate in their school buildings. Positive effects are not limited to school, as these students go home and into society with greater problem-solving capacity, more insight into their own behaviour and that of others and the strategies learnt at school generalise into society as a whole.

Conclusion

Incidents at schools are a fact. The reason that traditional or conventional approaches, such as the zero-tolerance approach, have limited effect is because they are too soft. They are too soft because they do not really address the issues. They avoid the real challenge and give perpetrators an easy way out. The restorative approach *seems* soft, but in reality it is the opposite. By asking perpetrators to face the emotions of those they have affected and to repair the consequences of their actions is far less soft than simply meting out a punishment, where these emotions are hardly addressed at all.

Furthermore, by asking perpetrators to face the people they have affected also increases the intensity of the negative emotions they experience. The most prominent of the emotions

experienced by a perpetrator is shame. Coming to grips with (especially negative) emotions is more difficult in the short term, yet if properly processed leads to psychologically more healthy individuals in the long term (see Hollister's (1967) concept "stren", for example and its more recent usage by Proulx, Koverola, Fedorowicz & Kral, (1995)).

Really resolving issues is beneficial for all those involved. Solving issues *for* others short-circuits the learning process. An environment should be created that is conducive for others to solve and resolve their own issues. *Give a man a fish, he will eat for one day. Teach a man to fish, he will never go hungry.* By changing our attitude towards incidents into an opportunity for learning will build, from the bottom up, a more robust society.

Restorative practices is not a project, it is not a method, it is a way of being. It is based on the ground principles of respect, trust and responsibility. True social coherence is not enforced on us from the outside but comes to be when we intrinsically respect our freedom and others' freedom within the limitation of interdependency. This too requires respect, trust and responsibility. If we mean what we say and our youth is really the future, can we afford not to take note?

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About the author

Markus Franciscus van Alphen was born on the 27th of June 1960 in Pretoria, South Africa. After receiving his school education he moved to Cape Town, where he received a degree in Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Cape Town and studied two years towards a commerce degree. He worked for several years as a partner of a firm of consulting engineers before moving to the Netherlands at age 31. His focus shifted to software development and from there towards the human component, leading him to complete a Master's degree in clinical psychology at the University of Amsterdam. Markus currently lives in Slovenia and works as a therapist for individuals, couples and families. He is a trainer and lecturer for undergraduate psychology students at NTI University in Leiden, NCOI in Hilversum and for post graduate psychology students. As a restorative practitioner he works both hands-on, being called in to resolve incidents and to lead the process of conflict resolution, as well as training others to implement the restorative approach.

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