

Speeches by Her Excellency Susan Satyanand

Launch of Respectful Schools publication, Wellington

09-Feb-2007

Thank you Dr Kiro.

Kia Ora, Kia Orana, Fakalofa Lahi Atu, Taloha Ni

Ladies and Gentlemen, Children's Commissioner Dr Cindy Kiro; Authors, Sean Buckley and Dr Gabrielle Maxwell; Secretary for Education, Karen Sewell; and fellow educators.

We all care about the children of New Zealand and aspire to a community in which they can get the education they need and deserve.

I am delighted to be here today to officially launch *Respectful Schools: Restorative Practices in Education*.

I have three children (now adult) and have some experience teaching in an intermediate school. One of my daughters is also a secondary school teacher.

My belief is that the education system needs to respond to and move with shifts in our culture. The greater autonomy now granted to New Zealand schools allows and encourages this to happen at the local level.

As a community, we must also face the challenge of ensuring that all children are treated fairly and with respect, and that they can all benefit from educational opportunities.

School is a vital time in every person's life. Experiences at school form vivid memories which can last a life-time. This is so whether they are positive, or less than positive.

Children who become disengaged during their school-years can continue to feel excluded and disaffected later in their lives.

I believe that, as a community, we need to strive to turn these children back on to education and all its possibilities.

Traditional disciplinary processes have been challenged in the context of our modern culture. Truancy, or even expulsion, can cause some children to slip through the net, or even become outcasts.

This is not only a disaster for these children and their families—it affects all of us in the long-term. We need to cherish all of our children, and cannot afford to lose any of the diverse contributions that make New Zealand such a special country.

As Dr Kiro acknowledges in her preface to the book, we don't need to reinvent the wheel. Many schools are doing a fantastic job, and their successes should be shared and emulated.

Some educators have come up with a strategy for pupils with serious disciplinary problems that uses principles of restorative justice. They have focused on respect, reintegration, and a “climate of care”.

Restorative justice is applied increasingly in the adult world to resolve conflict. In September last year I attended the opening of the Restorative Justice Centre Aotearoa with my husband.

In his address, Anand highlighted the flexibility of restorative justice and its ability to complement our existing educational system. Because the values of restorative justice are not aligned to any particular culture, they allow for diversity, by accommodating many different ways to resolve problems.

New Zealand schools are now ethnically and culturally diverse and one-size-fits-all solutions are not appropriate. Restorative justice aims to put individual children at the centre of the process.

Restorative justice promotes inclusiveness and democratic practices. Children who have become disengaged should not be written off as bad or hopeless. Schools that adopt the principles of restorative justice described in the *Respectful Schools* report, try to give these children an opportunity to heal. They provide ways for young people to work within their school environments to repair any harm that they have caused and engage with other sources of support for the them - such as their family.

The aim is for these children to continue to participate actively in education. Most importantly, however, the restorative justice initiative represents hope for their future.

I congratulate the authors of this book. Their vision, and the commitment of all those who have participated in this project, has lit a beacon to inspire all schools and students to reach their full promise.

Respectful Schools will empower teachers, by offering a set of new tools to help those students who need more attention and time than others.

I look forward to seeing the principles of restorative justice developed and applied within all New Zealand schools. I now take great pleasure in officially launching this book.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora tena koutou katoa