

## **Respectful Schools: Book Launch**

At the time I was invited to take part in the research for Respectful Schools, Gabrielle was exploring how we as New Zealanders might develop a ‘restorative society.’

That is to say, a society that is based on notions of restorative justice – one that is less focused on punishment and more focused on accountability through the repairing of harm and the rebalancing as best as possible of relationships between people.

This notion of a ‘restorative society’ was quite motivational for me in terms of my research for respectful schools. As a secondary school student I went to boarding school and as a result, I could have told you all well before undertaking this research that there are some kids, in fact many kids in my experience, who do not respond well to a heavily punitive discipline systems.

Of course I don’t think this has ever been particularly disputed.

The question has focused more on whether there are successful/viable alternatives to such punitive approaches – approaches that still maintain accountability but that do not diminish a youth’s schooling experience through exclusion and branding.

I believe that the research in ‘Respectful Schools’ shows that successful alternatives do exist, in this case through the use of restorative practices.

Coming back to the notion of a ‘restorative society’ – it seemed obvious to me and still does that schools need to play a fundamental role in this idea.

If we want a respectful, tolerant, diverse, supportive, safe and inclusive society, then that is what we must create in our schools. Unfortunately, I believe we still have a way’s to go before achieving this.

By no means have we yet been able to ensure that *all* kids in schools feel this sort of supportive environment. Obviously, an incredibly difficult task, but one that is so important for a plethora of reasons.

The reason I most want to highlight today is this: schools are simply miniature societies – or miniature communities and all of their members will one day leave their school environment and enter into the greater social environment bringing with them all their social habits – good and bad – many of which they will have learned in school.

As a member of greater society, I very much hope that the majority of young adults leaving school will increasingly be leaving schools with inclusive and restorative environments, therefore bringing with them views based on a restorative and inclusive paradigm as apposed to an exclusionary and punitive one.

I'm happy to say that the schools we were involved with are working towards this objective and its end result - a truly 'restorative society' in New Zealand.

These schools are teaching their youth – particularly those most at risk of poor future life outcomes – that society and community can be restorative and can be inclusive. That it is about looking after each other, working through difficult situations together, and guiding even the most 'disadvantaged' of us through the troubles life throws at us.

We must never forget that the kids whom we neglect, that we exclude and those we let 'fall through the cracks' today, will, undoubtedly, be the adults of the future who are most destructive to society and themselves.

So, I will end by saying thank you very much to the schools we were involved with – you are truly making a difference to both the youth of today and to the adults of tomorrow.