

Perceptions of Discipline and Restorative Practice in Chinese Schools

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Abstract

Restorative practice (RP) has become a disciplinary process of choice in many New Zealand schools. The first author, an international student who moves frequently between New Zealand and her home in China, learned about RP in her (NZ) university study, and began to wonder how perceptions of classroom discipline differ in these two very different countries - indeed in different cultures. This paper reports on a small research project that addresses the questions: What is the nature and objective of discipline in some Chinese schools? How would some Chinese teachers perceive the concept of restorative practice as it is used in New Zealand?

The researcher introduced RP to six teachers from three levels in two Chinese high schools. She interviewed them about the disciplinary system in their schools, following which they read a translated story of a restorative conference, and discussed it with the researcher. Analysis of these interviews shows that the Chinese teachers saw value in using such conferencing processes but this would require significant changes in school organization and teacher education. The pastoral care assumptions that permeate NZ education reflect very different attitudes to the expectations and obligations of teachers, students and parents, from those in China. Nevertheless, there was significant interest in restorative conferencing for students with bad behaviours, including the opportunity to discuss with parents. Chinese teachers care for their students and want them to behave well so that they learn well and will have a bright future. The report critically describes discipline in Chinese schools and considers whether restorative practice could be introduced into Chinese indeed eastern education in the future.