A Proactive Response to Challenging Behaviour
Collaborative Proactive Solutions Model

Mā te rongo, ka mōhio
Mā te mōhio, ka mārama
Mā te mārama, ka mātau
Mā te mātau, ka ora.

Ko wai au?

I tipu ake ahau
Ki raro i te ātārangi
o Ngā Kohatu Whakarakaraka o
Tamatea Pōkai Whenua
Ka rere te awa o Ōtākaro ki tōku taone, a Ōtautahi
He tangata tiriti ahau
Ko Kelly McGowan tōku ingoa
He kaiwhakahaere kaitakawaenga ahau
Kei te kura o Ruataniwha, ki Kaiapoi tōku tari
Hei whakakapinga māku,
ko te whakataukī o tōku mahi tēnei,
Mā te whiritahi, ka whakatutuki ai ngā pūmanawa ā tāngata
Tēnei te mihi ki a koutou katoa.

Abstract

Children who are viewed as disrespectful, out of control and beyond help are the children that need our help the most. They are often the recipients of ineffective, punitive interventions that lead to disengagement in education. Our schools report feeling frustrated that the number of students who present with challenging behaviour is increasing and often neurodiversity or trauma are associated. Schools report feeling ill equipped to support severe behaviour and resort to known operant strategies which are often unsuccessful, leading to stand downs and suspensions. The Collaborative Proactive Solutions model (CPS) requires thinking about challenging behaviours as a skill deficit, turning a problem situation into an opportunity to teach skills of frustration tolerance, flexibility and problem solving. We view the behaviour as the signal that the child is having difficulty meeting the expectations placed upon them and we are challenged to team up collaboratively to solve that problem with the child. This will be an empowering mindshift for myself and schools and provides an approach that the majority of schools don't currently use.

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Overview and Context

In my role as a Resource Teacher; Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Cluster Manager, I work alongside schools in the North Canterbury area who are working incredibly hard to create positive, inclusive and responsive environments for all students. The majority are on a *School Wide Positive Behaviour for Learning (SWPB4L)* journey, some have invested in Restorative Practice and most junior teachers have participated in the *Incredible Years Programme*. As a cluster we create an opportunity for Provisionally Certificated Teachers to meet in a community of practice and provide opportunities for kaiāwhina/TAs to engage in relevant regular professional learning. The schools are connected through three Kāhui Ako networks and have 21 Learning Support Coordinators between them. Resource Teachers of Literacy, RTLB, Ministry of Education practitioners and Mana Ake support for our schools is as timely as humanly possible despite the pressures on the system. However, I am hearing from

educators that it has never been more challenging to meet the presenting needs of ākonga attributed to a lack of resources, time and outdated systems.

The challenges are not just a North Canterbury issue as a recent NZEI survey of Primary Principals reported 30% of those who responded want to leave the profession within the next two years stating that the demands of the job are unmanageable (Stuff, 2023). You only need to scroll through the NZ Primary Teachers Facebook page to read that kaiako are feeling the same. Contributing to the pressure, our children are experiencing like no other generation before them the impact of technology, climate concerns, world conflict and pandemics. All of these experiences are having an impact on the nervous system, language development, social skills, engagement and academic achievement (Woodwood, 2022). All too often educators react to make quick assumptions and judgements about 'badly behaving students' based on their own understanding and value systems and challenging behaviour is described as intentional (Bomber, 2020). Stand downs, suspensions and exclusions are a measure of a schools response to student behaviour and currently 3% of our student population are being stood down. Between 1st July 2022 - 30 June 2023 there were a total of 29,244 stand downs across Aotearoa, but what is more alarming, 1,084 students were excluded from school (MOE source). At a time when there is a national focus on increasing attendance in schools, we are operating a punitive discipline system that reinforces students being isolated from education through stand downs and suspensions. Challenging students usually already have a sense of feeling flawed and rejected and the discipline measures we currently use in schools just reinforces this narrative for them.

Meanwhile, there seems to be a heightened debate about the right way to engage and educate our children and every advocate has their reasons for its approach and evidence to back it up. We are slowly increasing our understanding of development and the brain, but I believe that there is a gap between what we are learning and what we are doing. The Government and Ministry of Education are working to address the inequity in our education system by developing new initiatives, refreshments and action plans that address the promote inclusion, improve attendance and achievement. This cycles back to Principals who work to contextualise and implement these changes, and the reality is that continues to weigh heavily on time and resources of educators.

My aim is to not make an enemy of good educators achieving positive results for students. However, I am always on a journey to find ways to improve culture and opportunities for students to be successful. My purpose for this sabbatical report is to take the opportunity to reflect on recent learning and thoughts on how we can create positive ways for educators (and RTLB) to support students who are presenting with challenging behaviours. Acknowledging the current educational climate described, I will consider tweaks we can make around the edges to better support students to positively engage in their education. I wish to look for hope within our educational system to influence the language we use when talking about students who are challenging. My intention is to foster empathy for students who find school challenging and promote educators to team up with the students themselves to solve the barriers to engagement. I wish to heighten the awareness of detrimental and counterproductive effects of punitive interventions that often lead to disengagement and exclusion from school and negatively affect the schools culture.

McMenmiem (2018) shares a view that when we notice behaviour, we make sense of it by quickly deciding what that means *about* the person (pg 11). Three ways that we often use to decide what a person's actions mean about them are:

- They are naughty and behaviour is intentional, therefore correction and consequences are called for (often punitive)
- There is something wrong with them, therefore we need to fix them (a diagnosis and treatment is needed)
- Or they are trying to achieve or avoid something - I wonder what their motives are?

These mental models are often taken for granted in schools but heavily influence how we talk about students and what actions we make in response to challenging behaviour. Bomber (2020) describes that in the moment we simply see or experience what we think of as bad behaviour and have a reaction. Our own nervous system kicks in and we wish that the bad behaviour would stop, so we can relax and our sense of things being ok and under control can be restored. The language that a teacher uses when talking about managing challenging behaviour often gives us a clue which mental model they are working from. You can often hear if the teacher took the incident personally and how much of an inconvenience it was. I also think that teachers fear being judged negatively if control and order is not maintained in their classrooms. Additionally I have spoken to teachers who feel that the other students in the class are being traumatised by the challenging behaviour of that child. There is no wonder teachers feel the pressure when students act challengingly. However it's naive to think that we will never have a child behaving in challenging ways in our classrooms, so at what point do we give ourselves permission to not take it personally and plan proactively and create a climate of care by role modelling how we respond when students are struggling.

The introduction of *Positive Behaviour for Learning - School Wide* in 2009 in NZ schools has supported the shift in the language used when talking about student behaviour. In the past it wasn't uncommon to hear teachers talking about a student as having an anger management problem, for example. There has been a shift to naming the specific behaviour they see in order to develop precision statements that informs a plan. This is helpful, as it's difficult to do anything about someone's anger management, but we can do something about a child hitting another student to gain access to the ipad. Much of our educational discipline models are based on Skinner's behaviourist approach who was an influential psychologist in the 1930s. He developed the theory of behaviourism which focuses on the observable behaviours of individuals (Greene & Ablon, 2006). In simple terms this means we focus on behaviour. We name the behaviour, we count the behaviour and we can attempt to modify the behaviour by applying consequences that are designed to either make it less likely (punishments) or more likely (rewards) that the behaviour will occur again. A behavioural response is also focused on motivation (what is the individual trying to avoid or escape). This approach requires adults to theorise about the functions of a child's behaviour in order to develop a behaviour plan. However, by doing so neglects the role of internal processes of human behaviour that are influenced by cognitive factors, emotions and individual experiences. (Delahooke, 2020). What if the assumptions about why the behaviour is occurring are incorrect? The plan won't address the real unsolved problem or lagging skills

for the student so the expected progress doesn't result. Growing frustration around a lack of improvement follows and often results in more punitive interventions such as stand downs that don't solve the problems that continue to precipitate the challenging behaviour.

Behaviourism has also contributed to the DSM model of assigning a diagnosis based on a bunch of observable behaviours (Greene 2014). If a child's behaviour is seen as inattentive, impulsive and they have difficulties with social skills, they could very much meet the criteria for ADHD. It becomes a label that explains the behaviours, but not necessarily provides information about the best way to support that individual. The behaviourist model cannot and never was intended to help children develop complex capabilities such as social skills and learn to regulate their stress response (Perry, Szalavitz, 2017). I acknowledge that a label can support people to find their tribe, however it can be a costly and time consuming process and often can lead to the educators being no further ahead at knowing how to support that individual.

I am privileged to team up with a local Kāhui Ako who are dedicating time and investment into disrupting the pathway to stand downs and suspensions. Part of this work was interviewing whānau whose child had been excluded from school. There was a pattern to the stories they told which was appropriately named the 'disaster cake recipe' by one of the parents. It goes something like this... the student was trying to manage a difficult situation but did so violently, the student was stood down, parents met with teachers and a plan that focused *on the student changing their behaviour* was slid across the table to the parents that was developed by the educators, the plan was not followed through over time, the student's behaviour didn't change as they lacked the skills to be successful or it wasn't solving the problem for the student, the student was stood down a few more times, the parents felt powerless and blamed, teacher's frustration continued to grow, the school leadership were challenged by other parents to do something about that student, the student was suspended and appeared before the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees were told that everything had been tried so maybe a fresh start at another school would be helpful. The student was excluded. The disaster cake recipe leaves everyone feeling unsuccessful and the student pays the ultimate price for their difficulty to regulate their own stress and often unlucky adaptive behaviours that they have developed to keep them safe in the world. Parents of students receiving learning support services often indicate that while part of their child's struggles may be created as a result of neurodivergent differences or disability, many issues stem out of their learning environment reinforcing the fact that they are struggling achievers or lacking the skills as their same age peers, this effecting a sense of connection and belonging (Kwakenat, 2018). Exclusion often results in negative impacts on student's health and safety, as well as lifelong damage to their developmental trajectory and ability to participate fully in society. Research has clearly linked school exclusion to long-term unemployment and entrenched social and behavioural problems, substance abuse and youth crime (Towl & Hemphill, 2016).

There are hopeful signs that education in Aotearoa is moving towards a more successful cake recipe. New Zealand signed the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) in 1993, committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard in matters that affect them. The previous Commissioner for Children, Judge Beacroft

was relentless in his mission to put children in the middle. Judge Beacroft talks about children and young people being the experts of their own experiences in education (Mana Mokopuna, 2017) and that they have the right to have a say and have their views heard on decisions that affect them. Since 2020, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has released some key documents that enable the 54 articles of the UNCRC to be fulfilled. One such document, the *National Education and Learning Priorities in Schools* (2020). This is the statutory document enabling the Education and Training Act 2020. This document challenges us to put learners at the centre, ensure that education opportunities and that outcomes are within reach for every learner. It highlights the importance of supporting kaiako to develop confidence to teach diverse learners with varying needs, to appropriately modify teaching approaches and to break down ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic stereotypes (NELP, 2020). Another document, *Ka Hikitia - Ka Hāpaitia* (2020) has the guiding principles of excellent outcomes for Māori learners and their to whānau create a strong sense of belonging, recognise and build on strengths, and support strong relationships between learners and whānau, hapū, iwi, educators and others to support excellent outcomes. All giving practical effect to Tiriti o Waitangi in the education system. *Aramai He Tētēkura - A Guide to Understanding Distress and Minimising the use of Physical Restraint* (2023) provides a practical approach to Recognise (Mātaitia), Respond (Atawhaitia) and Restore (Whakawhenuatia). The document introduction states that *every ākonga has tapu, mana and potential. Schools have the responsibility to create a safe haven where whānau can contribute to mana-enhancing strategies and proactive planning* (Pg 11). Building a culture of care includes creating a sense of belonging, engagement and achievement through connected relationships. Educators need to recognise that schools and classroom environments may contribute to student distress and to provide engaging and reflective teaching environments that support student wellbeing.

All of these documents are highlighting our responsibility as educators to ensure that all students and whānau feel safe at school, know their culture belongs, feel listened to and are nurtured to learn in a way that suits them as individuals. We need to seek and listen to the views of our students as often they have the answer to their own problems. It is up to educators to give attention to the environment of schools, the way we talk to and about students and how we ultimately support them to be the best they can be. Schools need to move beyond just showing a commitment to the above documents, and take action to deconstruct established structures and routines (including punitive responses to behaviour) and reassemble them in ways that are human centric. Our old ideas about behaviour modification are no longer efficient when students are growing up in an ever complex world of uncertainty (Perry, 2021). We need to rethink how we support students to recognise and navigate the problems and challenges in ways that they will experience in the future by actively involving them in the process. The neuroscience and trauma informed practices are a growing focus for schools. Bruce Perry (2021) talks about the importance of teachers creating communities of trust and regulation, which includes to actively notice and celebrate differences, understanding that all students turn up with strengths and challenges. He believes that teachers don't have to have any specialised trauma or attachment training, but they need to understand the power they have just connecting with students. It's not what you know, it's how you are and how you leave them feeling. The work of Bruce Perry would suggest we have an important clue of how to improve our support systems in schools and

that is to utilise the remarkable power of relationships, moving away from a behaviourist to a relational approach.

Kids do well if they can!

Watching the disaster cake recipe being played out one too many times and an increase in commentary about students being more challenging than ever before, I wanted to consider if it's time to change our recipe. I was interested to investigate Ross Green's *Collaborative Proactive Solutions model* (CPS) which is a relational targeted response to challenging behaviour, with some underpinning philosophical shifts in the way we view, talk and respond to challenging behaviour.

The history of the CPS model can be traced back to Dr Greene's work with children and families in the 1990s. He found that traditional behaviour management techniques, including rewards and punishments, were not effective in addressing the underlying issues that contribute to challenging behaviour in children. Driven by the desire to find a more compassionate and effective approach, he developed the CPS model (Kwakenat, 2018). In 2009, Greene founded *Lives in the Balance* (n.d) website which serves as a platform to disseminate information about the CPS model, provide training and support for professionals, advocating for the needs of children and their families. Today, the CPS model is widely used and implemented in various settings worldwide including schools, therapeutic programs and simply applied as an effective parenting technique. It has been particularly influential in supporting children with neurodevelopmental differences, such as ADHD and Autism and continues to evolve as new research and insights inform practices.

There are five big shifts (Greene, 2014)

1. Emphasis is on problems (and solving them) rather than on behaviours (and modifying them).
2. The problem solving is collaborative with the child.
3. The problem solving is proactive, not reactive.
4. Kids do well if they can, and if a kid could do well, they would do well. Not true is attention seeking, manipulative, coercive, unmotivated or limited testing.
5. Doing well is preferable. We have been focused on motivation, when we should focus on skills.

Taking the approach that "kids do well if they can," instead of "kids do well if they want to," shifts the lens from 'bad behaviour' being intentional to understanding that the child is likely to be lacking the skills to meet the expectation placed upon them and have problems that they are unable to positively solve for themselves. The essential skills include executive skills, language processing/communication skills, emotional regulation skills, cognitive flexibility skills or social skills. In particular Greene refers to the ability to separate the emotions you're feeling in response to a problem from the thinking you must do to resolve it. He further states that *"while emotions can be quite useful for mobilising or energising people to solve problems, thinking is how problems get solved" (pg 19).* This is referred to as *separation of affect*. In Greene's work, he places children into two categories, lucky and unlucky. *Lucky* children might respond to a difficult situation by pouting, crying, withdrawing or whinging

and this often elicits empathy from the adult who will help them to work through the difficult situation. *Unlucky* children typically respond to the same situation by yelling, screaming, hurting someone or swearing and this can often lead to being removed, reprimanded and punished and without the support to work through the difficult situation that led to the big emotion in the first place. Both are adaptive responses to a physiological state, not purposeful misbehaviour (Greene, 2014). It needs to be noted that lagging skills are not the primary target of intervention in the CPS model but it is the unsolved problems. When we use the lagging skills to sharpen the lens and then in turn solve the problems collaboratively with students, skills are being learnt.

My intention for this sabbatical report was to make some connections and consider if the CPS model could be Aotearoa'ised for our schools, as well as considering the implications for RTLB practice. For the purpose of making the connections, it will be useful to have a brief overview of the framework. I will also interchange the terms students, children and kids to reflect Dr Ross Greene's work.

Executive Summary of CPS

Summarised from Greene R (2014). *Lost at School: Why our Kids with Behavioural Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them*. Scribner, New York.

In the CPS model, adults (parents or educators) work together with children to find mutually satisfactory solutions to the unsolved problems that cause the behaviour. It requires a compassionate and proactive approach to address challenging behaviour, promoting a positive and supportive environment. There are three key steps

1. Change our Lens - challenging behaviour is not the result of poor parenting, low socio economics, faulty learning or poor motivation. Kids do well if they can. Instead of assuming that children are willfully misbehaving, the CPS model starts by recognizing that challenging behaviour is a result of lagging skills and unmet needs. If the child isn't doing well, something is getting in their way and it's our job to find out what that is.
2. Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems - the adults will work together to identify the skills the child is lacking and the specific expectation the child is having difficulty meeting, called unsolved problems. This is accomplished by using the Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP) as a discussion guide. Once unsolved problems have been identified, they will be prioritised on which ones will be worked on first using a problem solving plan.
3. Solve Problems collaboratively and proactively - the adult invites the child to solve the problem collaboratively using a three step framework - the Empathy step, the Define Adult Concerns step and the Invitational step. This is called a Plan B.

The disaster cake recipe I described earlier reflects what Greene refers to as the PLAN A. This is when a child isn't meeting an expectation so adults impose a consequence or a plan. For example, *you hit another child in the playground, so you aren't allowed in the playground for three days*. There are a couple of shortfalls with this approach including the fact that it doesn't solve the problem that caused the child to hit and it doesn't involve the child in

solving the problems that affect their life. However, Plan A can work for ordinary children as they are more likely to have the skills to comply when a consequence has been imposed. This approach typically leads to challenging children being more challenging as the demand and expectations being placed upon them outstrips the skills they have to respond adaptively.

PLAN B is used for any problem that can be solved using plan A, but it's a completely different approach. Plan B is when you solve the problem collaboratively together with the child. Remembering that the behaviour is the sign that there is an unsolved problem, a plan B conversation helps the adult to identify what is making it difficult for the child to meet an expectation. Plan B also helps the child to understand the adult's concern to the problem and then they collaborate together on a mutually satisfying solution. Each step brings crucial ingredients to the durable and collaborative resolution of problems. It is much more than just talking to the child, there are many nuances to this approach and it takes some practice on behalf of the adult. Considerations to the timing, engaging the child, quality questioning skills, the use of visuals or fidget toys need to be made based on age, stage and knowledge of the child. The process involves three steps.

1. Empathy and understanding: Adults seek to understand the child's perspective. Through careful questioning the adult works to understand the child's concern or perspective about the particular problem. "I've noticed that…. What's up?
2. Share adult concern: the adult shares with the child their concern. "The thing is.. Or my concern is.."
3. Invitational step: Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory. "I wonder if there is something we can do about (child's unsolved problem) and also do something about (the adult's concern). Do you have any ideas?

Moving from power and control to collaboration and problem solving gives us more opportunity to work with students to be precise about the unsolved problems they are experiencing while teaching them skills. It demonstrates to the child that you are invested in addressing their concern and the goal is to come up with a solution so the problem doesn't come up again.

A word of caution around over simplifying the CPS model resulting in false conclusions when people try to generalise it creating buzz phrases. Misunderstandings and distortions about the complex process of drilling a Plan B conversation for example, can reduce the effectiveness of the process. I highly recommend that you read *Lost at School: Why our Kids with Behavioural Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them* (Greene 2014) and connect with *Lives in the Balance* (n.d.) website where detailed training material is available.

Within the Context of Aotearoa

I am acutely aware of the inappropriateness of taking an educational intervention from one culture and world view and implementing it into another culture without giving serious thought and investigating how it will impact on the people. It is my responsibility as an

educator in Aotearoa, New Zealand to be aware of the practices that diminish or empower mana for students and their families. Reading a summary of a published peer reviewed research (Wagener & Hyson, 2023) noted that there were limitations to the trials of CPS, including that the sample of families and children who participated were Caucasian and middle class. As Māori and Pacifica students disproportionately turn up in our discipline processes, it is imperative to consider how CPS could be a response that provides a positive future for our Māori and Pacifica students. Being aware of the biases that exist in our system as a whole and working to challenge the low expectations for Māori students is essential ongoing work for all of us. Therefore when thinking about the implementation of CPS we need to equally give attention to effective, authentic, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches (Riwai-Couch, 2021).

He Awa Whiria: a braided rivers approach (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Gillon, 2015) is a framework that draws inspiration from both Indigenous and Western knowledge streams, while maintaining consciousness of Māori sovereignty. Macfarlane et al. (2015) suggest that it is inappropriate to seek solutions to Indigenous challenges solely from Western knowledge, but blending the two knowledge streams has the potential to create an approach more powerful than either knowledge stream is able to produce unilaterally. I am heartened that at the core of the CPS model are relationships, collaboration and gives the authentic space for whānau and students to share their lived experiences to solve problems without placing blame or shame. I acknowledge to Aotearoa'ise the CPS model there will need to be considerable kōrero from the outset to seek guidance from Māori to embed tikanga. There are some potential tensions identified including Dr Ross Greene stating that he would not complete the Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems with the family and the educators at the same time (Illume Conference, 2023). His reasoning was that we don't ask school to solve problems in the home (e.g. not brushing teeth), so why would we ask the parents to solve problems at school (e.g. not coming off the computer to go out to break). Within the context of Aotearoa, New Zealand, one of the key outcomes of *Ka Hikitia - Ka Hāpaitia* (2020) is ensuring that education provision responds to students within the context of their whānau. As RTLB we work to place students and their whānau at the centre of decisions, actions and practices that affect their interests, goals and wellbeing. We work to develop one coordinated plan, using a flexible, tailored, responsive and negotiated approach (He Pikorua, 2022). I conclude that it is essential that joined up conversations with whānau and educators need to guide our thinking. These factors are not insurmountable if we look for aspirations from the likes of the Whānau Education Action Plan approach (Ka Hikitia in Action, 2015) which is a process that supports whānau to have educational conversations and identify people and educational support to help them achieve their aspirations for their children. This type of approach is central to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and listening to culturally relevant and inclusive approaches for advancing positive outcomes for our mokopuna.

Implications for Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Practice

RTLB practitioners play a crucial role in the NZ education system providing support and expertise to address the learning and behaviour needs of students who require additional support to be successful at school. RTLB work in partnership with schools, whānau/families and other professionals to promote positive educational outcomes and wellbeing for students. Schools can make requests for support for individual or groups of students, class or school wide support and professional development for educators. One purpose of this sabbatical was to consider if the CPS model could be a useful asset based approach to include as part of RTLB practice.

He Pikorua: Our Practice Framework (2022) guides learning support provision in New Zealand. Its intentions are to provide clear, practical guidance to enable mokopuna and whānau to achieve best outcomes in any learning setting. Although the CPS approach and the He Pikoura framework have different origins and applications, they share common values such as empathy, collaboration, strengths-based approaches and a holistic perspective. Both highlight the importance of building positive relationships and promoting effective problem-solving in various contexts. He Pikoura has a set of practice principles that guide RTLB in the work that they do. In order to make some more specific connections, I have considered how those practice principles align with the practices and philosophy that underpins the CPS model.

1. **Mokopuna and whānau centred** - The CPS model places significant emphasis on understanding the concerns and needs of all parties involved. It involves building trust with families/whānau and inviting them into the conversation. Working alongside whānau and valuing their knowledge is essential for finding mutually agreeable solutions while promoting empathy and cultural understanding. Completing the ALSUP helps whānau and kaiako focus on the things that they can do something about.
2. **Strengths-Based Approach** - The CPS model emphasises identifying and building upon individual strengths and resources to address challenges effectively. The approach encourages resilience and a positive outlook. Collaborating with mokopuna to develop a Plan B shows them that we value their views and acknowledge the unsolved problem without placing blame or shame on them.
3. **Collaborative -** At the core of the CPS model is collaboration. The emphasis is on bringing together individuals to analyse information with an open mind. It requires teaming up with the student. Moving from power and control to collaboration and problem solving gives us more opportunity to work with students to be precise about the unsolved problems they are experiencing while teaching them the skills they need.
4. **Culturally affirming and responsive** - The CPS model advocates for fair and equitable solutions that consider the perspectives and needs of all involved parties. In doing so, we value cultural equity. Children and whānau are partners in planning, ensuring the team approach reflects identity and culture.

5. **Inclusive** - skills and problems are solved within the context in which they occur. The CPS model focuses on supporting whānau and kaiako to know how to respond to an individual's needs, enhancing wellbeing.
6. **Ecological** - The ALSUP conversation helps to highlight interactions between students and the multiple environments they live in. When collaborating with the students to develop a plan B, the adult is listening carefully for the lived experience within the environment. Plan B's are likely to include supports, adaptations and changes within the learning environment for the student.
7. **Evidence Informed** - CPS is based on robust methodologies and sound evidence. The model promotes the interaction between inquiry, educator expertise and includes the perspectives and experiences of whānau and child.

In practical terms He Pikorua is an inquiry approach that guides RTLB mahi, so I have also considered the actionable implications for RTLB based on that inquiry approach. This includes;

Whakawhanaungatanga - Build connections

- Listen and share - clarify what matters.
- Notice and reframe the language of educators - kids do well if they can.
- Inviting all adults and the child to be part of the solution.
- Check and gain consent from everyone throughout the process.
- We talk about what's been shared together and agree on roles and responsibilities.
- We focus on strengthening adult capability.
- We focus on aspirations and goals and in the process it builds connections.
- CPS reduces the need for whānau to "tell their story."

Kohikohi - Gather information

- Learn about the unique aspects of the problem from all involved, including gathering student and whānau voice.
- Notice the lens through which that teacher views behaviour and focus the kōrero on identifying difficulties meeting adult expectations over modifying behaviour or labelling the child.
- Observe the student within the context of the learning environment and during specific times when they have difficulties managing the adults expectations.
- We collect examples of when the student is successful and can demonstrate the skills that could support their difficulties.
- Gather the *key adults* together and complete the ALUSP in order to help identify knowledge, lagging skills, unsolved problems and strengths.

Āta whakaaro - Sense making

- Collaboratively analyse and summarise information with an open mind and without any predetermined outcome.
- Identify the expectations the student is having difficulty meeting reliably. Write the unsolved problems. Difficulty followed by a verb.
- Avoiding adult theorising and clumping unsolved problems.
- Write and decide what's important by prioritising the top three unsolved problems.

Tātai - Plan collaboratively

- Collaboratively develop the Problem Solving Plan.
- We will Plan C the rest of the unsolved problems and discuss how to manage that.
- Roles and responsibilities are agreed with all team members
- Script the Plan B conversation based on age/stage appropriate language.
- We will consider when, where and how we will have the Plan B conversation with the student.
- The key people will kōrero with the ākonga and work through the empathy, sharing adult concern and invitational steps to develop a Plan B.

Whakamahi - Take action with integrity

- Plan B is implemented and progress is monitored authentically.
- Plan B is in the context of the daily routine and activities of the student.
- Team members act with respect for the tikanga that is important to ākonga and whānau.
- Celebrate success and look for opportunities to generalise skills learnt to the other unsolved problems.

Whai whakaaro - Reflect together

- Throughout the life of the plan B, collaborate as a team to reflect regularly on progress.
- When challenges arise with the Plan B, check that the plan is doable, all parties are doing what they say they would do and it's mutually satisfactory. Make adjustments as required.
- Consider who else is benefiting from Plan B?
- Revisit the Plan C list with the team and consider if these unsolved problems have been addressed or need to be prioritised for a Plan B.

Mana motuhake - Empowering others

- Reflect on what we have learnt about that individual and what they need to be successful.
- Reflect on the relationships of everyone who supports the student. The strength of the home and school partnership.
- Reflect on the key aspects of the environment and what we have learnt from listening to the student about the barriers to engagement.
- Reflect with kaiako and whānau about what they have discovered focusing on lagging skills and unsolved problems (instead of behaviour).

Through my RTLB connections it appears that there are only a handful of clusters that are working to include the CPS approach into casework beyond referring to the term "kids do well if they can." Those that are have highlighted the challenges around working within the constraints of the system and changing the adults perspective on challenging behaviours. Equally the process can be derailed by the lack of genuine time and skill required to drill to develop a Plan B collaboratively with students. Acknowledging that this model also feels different for students and is dependent on the relationships, it can take time to build trust

that adults will listen to their solutions and take their ideas seriously. Reflecting back on the disaster cake recipe, those challenges are worth overcoming. The RTLB that I have spoken with have found it useful to redesign data collection forms adjusting the past functional behaviour assessment to identify the expectations that the student is having difficulty meeting. Tweaking the words on CAP plans to focus on difficulties rather than behaviours is another way to change the focus and conversation that happens at collaborative meetings. One RTLB shared that it feels mana enhancing to have a kōrero about the difficulty the student is having in meeting the adult expectation, as opposed to emotive descriptions of behaviour or listening to adults theorising over possible diagnosis or demanding resourcing to pay for teacher aide support.

As schools recognise that our past responses to challenging behaviour are leading to poor outcomes for our students, RTLB practitioners have the potential to team up with kaiako to change the lens within the context of a problem that needs to be solved. The CPS philosophy fits well with our principles and the model fits with the He Pikorua inquiry process. There is certainly potential to add our unique culture on the approach to best suit the needs of our context in Aotearoa.

A Case Study

It's not usual practice for a Cluster Manager to engage in RTLB casework, however on returning from sabbatical I took the opportunity to team up with some teachers and support a student potentially using the CPS approach. To protect the identity of the student he will be referred to as RJ.

The request for support described RJ as a year 5 student (9 years old) attending an urban primary school. RJ has a long history with Oranga Tamariki (state care) and is currently in a temporary care arrangement. RJ's life experience to date can only be described as traumatic. In the spirit of CPS, the focus was not fixating on how RJ got to be the way he was. However his behaviours were described as challenging, in particular following instructions, especially when asked to come off the computer before a break time. At the point of my involvement, RJ had just been stood down for three days due to an incident at school where he was restrained after becoming violent when he refused to come off the computer when asked. Following their usual process, the school had written a returning to school plan which RJ was expected to sign at a meeting which was attended by his social worker and the schools Learning Support Coordinator (LSC). RJ took one look at the returning to school plan (Plan A) and promptly told the adults in the room what he thought of it and then trashed the office. I connected with the LSC the next day who explained the situation to date. Not completely following CPS model with fidelity, I took the opportunity to suggest that we work together to write a script to support a Plan B conversation that could be held between the LSC and RJ. The LSC was keen to try and the next day had the Plan B conversation. It worked a treat! RJ started the conversation on the other side of the office, but as the LSC started the empathy step, RJ moved closer to her and engaged in answering her drilling questions. The adult assumptions prior to the conversation was that RJ was addicted to his computer. As the LSC drilled, she established that the computer was a preferred activity, but navigating the playground was RJ's real difficulty. Further observations highlighted that if RJ wasn't scaffolded with a person, place and activity prior to break times, he felt unsafe in the

playground so struggled to leave the classroom. RJ fully understood the adults' concerns about coming off the computer when asked and so a signal was agreed upon during the collaboratively problem solving step and a collaborative plan was developed together for being in the playground. Did it go smoothly? Not always, coming off the computer when asked is still challenging at times, but we see the behaviour as a signal that RJ is struggling with something. CPS promotes a mentality that encourages a focus on continuous improvement over time (Greene 2014). The initial Plan B conversation had built a positive relationship and shown RJ that the adults around him were there to support and listen to him and solve problems collaboratively. We know that each time we work through a Plan B the student is learning to manage his emotional response to frustration.

The evidence of this was a few weeks later when I just happened to pop in and see RJ in the corner of the classroom where he had made a barrier of chairs around him and he sat on the computer. His behaviour was telling us clearly that he wasn't coping. I had a chat with the teacher and suggested we try an emergency Plan B conversation. It went something like this. "Hi RJ, I have noticed that you are on the computer when you should be with the rest of the class, I was wondering what's up?" RJ looked up at his teacher, closed the screen of the computer and said "I'm just really tired." After further drilling RJ shared that he no longer wanted to entertain his mentor and could the mentor help someone else. I should explain that part of RJs support plan was to spend time with a male role model who would help him engage with the learning. RJ shared with his teacher that he felt it was his responsibility to entertain him while they were together. No one saw that statement coming. The teacher shared her concern about RJ not coming off the computer and joining the rest of the class and they talked through what they could do together to support getting through the final days of the term and tweaked the signal for coming off the computer. The teacher clearly prioritised the relationship over compliance in that moment which resulted in the problem being solved together.

We could have become really overwhelmed by RJ's past experiences, the life he was living in foster care and his past violent behaviours. We understand that power over RJ causes conflict, but working with him to solve his problems has built a positive relationship with his teacher and the LSC and he knows that he will be supported to solve his problems while learning skills in flexibility, frustration tolerance and emotional regulation. It's early days but there are some really great signs that the violence we experienced in the past from RJ are infrequent and he has experienced success being in the playground playing with his peers.

Implementation within a School

Dr Ross Greene (2014) provides a lot of practical advice on how to implement CPS into an educational environment. Talking with a local school, advice was given to start small with people that you don't need to convince. Starting with a team around one student and working through the ALSUP as a discussion guide and prioritising one unsolved problem seems like sensible first steps. I suggest using all the resources available on the *Lives in the Balance* website, particularly the drilling cheat sheet to guide a skillful Plan B conversation. Having a clear understanding amongst staff regarding Plans A, B and C is also essential. Teachers need to feel safe and given the authority to Plan C behaviours that others might see as needing to be addressed. When you start to see success it could be useful to consider

other asset based pedagogies that are being implemented in NZ schools and consider the intersection between them and CPS to further inspire a culture of caring and inclusion. As we would with any approach we chose to implement in a school, it would be necessary to take time to align the schools key messages, practices, systems, and school policies in order to operationalise the CPS model within a school and of course prioritise time and support for people close to the action.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the ongoing challenge for leaders in schools to respond to their school community and their need for justice when their child is harmed. In general, school communities expect students with challenging behaviours to be punished and unfortunately we have a discipline system that reinforces that. Parents demanding other children be stood down or suspended from school is pretty commonplace across North Canterbury. The mental models of our parents come from their own experiences at school and it takes considerable time for educators to convince them otherwise. As CPS is a proactive response, I wonder about the potential to support students with lagging skills and unsolved problems before behaviours become reinforced patterns of behaviour if we catch them early enough. While working through a CPS approach we can teach the other students that when someone is struggling we problem solve, not exclude. The use of punitive responses teaches the other children and reinforces to the parent community that belonging to the classroom is conditional and contingent upon their willingness and ability to be a certain kind of person (Venet, 2023). Imagine a community culture shift achieved through teachers role modelling unconditional positive regard for every student even in a moment of meltdown, reinforcing that our response speaks volumes to all the rest of the students. It isn't the behaviour of that child that threatens the community; it's the response to that behaviour. If a teacher stays curious and relational they can reinforce to all students that they can trust the teacher to support them to listen just as the teacher did in my case study.

My Call to Action

I am aware that I have only started scratching the surface of the CPS model, however, it is difficult to unsee, once you have seen it! I am using the approaches on occasions with my three teenage daughters with great effect. I will continue to apply my new learning to my daily mahi and see what sticks. I want to unpack the nuances of the CPS model with my team and gain their feedback on what makes a difference to students, whānau and kaiako. I will continue to refine the language I use so that the kōrero I have with educators is aligned with a relational response to supporting students. I am committed to honouring and validating indigenous knowledge and plan to work alongside those colleagues who challenge me to keep cultural considerations front and centre. Additionally I plan to share this information with our Learning Support Delivery networks across North Canterbury and share my sabbatical findings with my Ministry of Education colleagues that work to support students who present with challenging behaviour. Potentially, we could set up a CPS Professional Learning Group through the National NZ RTLB Learning network. Most importantly, I want to gather the stories from children, whānau and kaiako on how they flourished when they were invited to share their voice authentically around the table to solve problems collaboratively.

In Summary

Ultimately, no child wants to come to school to fail. Time and time again we make efforts to moderate, punish or medicate our children, when instead we should be concerned about the very nature of our schools, systems and discipline structures (Bomber, 2020). If our children are being unsuccessful at school it's our job to find out what is getting in the way. Too often educators make assumptions and judgements that are incorrect and continue to perpetuate the challenging behaviour leading to increasingly punitive responses resulting in potentially poor life outcomes for students. These punitive responses are a condition of inequality, which disproportionately affects children who already face disadvantage. Responding to challenging behaviours is uncomfortable, time consuming and high stakes. As leaders in education we need to help people see beyond their own values, beliefs or assumptions and explore a relational mindset that drives a non-punitive education system and new ways of being. We know from brain research that learning and behaviour are biological and challenging behaviour isn't intentional, but an emotional response to a problem that they don't have the skills to manage. Our educational guiding documents are challenging us to put children and whānau in the centre and to do that we need to invite them around the table and provide space for authentic collaboration and problem solving. Considering the current challenges and sense of overwhelm already facing schools, I feel we don't have a moment to lose on finding a better way. As a result of this sabbatical I can see a real opportunity for RTLB to influence schools to think, talk and respond to challenging behaviours as lagging skills and problems yet to be solved.

Overall, my hope is for schools to be filled with educators that notice when things aren't working for children and simply ask them… what's up?

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