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A stylized graphic on a purple background. It features a thick yellow path that starts from the left, curves downwards, then upwards through a white and black striped archway, and continues to curve downwards and then upwards again.

# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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## **WJE 2006: Call for papers: Pacific education, Research and practice**

*The Waikato Journal of Education* is a well-established peer reviewed publication that has quality articles on a range of topics related to education.

New Zealand has a strong presence in Pacific education, and Pacific communities have a strong presence in New Zealand schools. However, opportunities for publication of Pacific research in mainstream journals are limited. Therefore, this call for papers seeks articles that focus on Pacific education; both research and practice. Pacific research is reflective of the traditions of the past, as well as the present and future. It often embodies different paradigms, perspectives and critical stances that are not always captured in mainstream research and aims to benefit Pacific communities. Articles will be welcomed that theorise about Pacific research, report on research projects, report on an innovative practice or initiative, or a combination of any of these. As well as traditional manuscripts, the journal welcomes submissions in other formats, such as short stories, poetry and drawings.

Submissions please to Timote Varioleti ([varioleti@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:varioleti@waikato.ac.nz)) and Jane Strachan ([jane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jane@waikato.ac.nz)), School of Education, The University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. Please submit 3 blind copies and a separate page with author/s contact details by 30 April 2006. Electronic submissions also accepted for consideration.

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# CHANGING SCHOOL CULTURE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores how action research helped one school positively change its school culture. This school, Caversham Primary School, used GSE's (Group Special Education's) Eliminating Violence, Managing Anger Programme (Special Education Services, 2000) as a tool to examine and reduce bullying at the school. This programme mirrors the phases of action research and is based on some of the same premises of action research; for example, self-reflection and a commitment to effect positive school change. The results of Caversham School's self-reflective research eventually created a positive change to the school's culture so that there was a reduction in the bullying rates at the school. The research programme was also driven by a strong leader who improved her own leadership style in response to feedback within the research.*

## **KEYWORDS**

Action research, School culture, School leadership, Bullying

## **ACTION RESEARCH AND CHANGE**

Action research's purpose is to positively create improvements and educational change (Kember, 2000; Mills, 2003). It is a research process and strategy which is collaborative, relevant and practical in that the research is not divorced from what happens in classrooms and schools (Meyer, Park, Grenot-Sheyer, Schwartz & Harry, 1998). Action research can be used by teachers to systematically research, and reflect on, their own teaching practice. Through the research process, they, themselves, 'own' and can benefit from the knowledge that they are generating for themselves. Such research avoids only being owned by an academic in an 'ivory tower' who publishes it for other academics to read in their towers. It is designed instead to encourage action for school improvement and change (Mills, 2003). This research can also be done by a collaborative team who represent the whole school community (Ballard, Watson, Bray, Burrows & MacArthur, 1992; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This reinforces the belief that school staff, students and parents have valuable perspectives and ideas that can improve the educational experiences of children.

Geoff Mills' definition of action research perhaps best incorporates all of these elements. He stated that action research is:

**Appendix 1: Matched Lists of Good Practice Statements for Diverse Students and EAL Students (from Franken & McComish, 2003a)**

Major statements of good practice from Alton-Lee (2003)	Major categories of good practice statements for EAL students	Specific characteristics of good practice for EAL students
Effective links are created between school and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised, to facilitate learning.	Inclusive school	School practices and policies are inclusive of all languages and cultures and build on these as resources for learning.
Curriculum goals, resources, including ICT usage, task design, teaching and school practices are effectively aligned.	Whole school alignment	EAL curriculum goals, resources, and pedagogical practices are aligned with other curriculum teaching and school activities.
Quality teaching is focused on student achievement (including social outcomes) and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for heterogeneous groups of students. Teachers and students engage constructively in goal oriented assessment.	Appropriate goals and assessment	Second language assessment is systematic, comprehensive, regular and meaningful to learners. Assessment should reflect developmental aspects of second language learning and second language literacy acquisition. Goals for L2 learners are age appropriate and are not limited to performance in easier contexts or on easier objectives.
Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive and cohesive learning communities. Pedagogy promotes learning orientations, student self-regulation, metacognitive strategies and thoughtful student discourse.	Teaching and learning styles	Students experience positive classroom environments for interaction. Student learning strategies and styles from other language backgrounds and educational contexts are built on constructively. Classes and individuals are taught and assisted to become skilful learners, and to participate actively in managing their own learning.

<p>Quality teaching is responsive to student learning processes.          Opportunity to learn is effective and sufficient.          Multiple task contexts support learning cycles.          Pedagogy scaffolds and provides appropriate feedback on students' task engagement.</p>	<p>Classroom practices</p>	<p>Students are given sufficient exposure to language input, as well as opportunities to use language in extended contexts.          Learners are given language opportunities that allow for significant repetitions and expansion of use.          Students are supported by language scaffolding that facilitates the development of the three goals of restructuring, accuracy and fluency.          Learners are given explicit and focused instruction on all aspects of language</p>
	<p>Content of EAL teaching</p>	<p>The specification of content of EAL teaching is comprehensive and based on research in second language learning in school contexts.          Vocabulary development is targeted, especially in the area of academic vocabulary.          An appropriate range of texts is encountered.</p>

Any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counsellors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment ... and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved. (Mills, 2003, p. 5)

The action research process usually involves proceeding through a number of research cycles. Each cycle has five steps that begin, firstly, with self-reflection about the present situation. The second step is that the researchers develop a plan for changing the situation. This plan is implemented in the third step, and evaluated through critical reflection in the fourth step. Finally, the last step is to begin a second research cycle taking into account the knowledge that was gained from the first research cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Mills, 2003).

In 2000, Caversham Primary School implemented such a process when it decided to reduce violence and bullying at its school, although it did not call the project 'action research'. The school used the *Eliminating Violence Programme* from Special Education Services (now called Group Special Education) to drive its endeavours, and this programme mirrors an action research process. The programme begins with a 12 month commitment from the whole school to reflect upon its school culture and violence through a survey of its school community. This is similar to the first step of the action research cycle which involves examining the present. After this, a school core group, which manages the project, develops and implements a programme based on the survey results, which can be likened to steps two and three of an action research cycle. At the end of the programme, the core group then re-surveys the school community to evaluate the programme and make necessary changes, as in step four in an action research cycle (Special Education Services, 2000).

The *Eliminating Violence Programme's* vision is to promote a prosocial school culture as a means of working toward managing anger and eliminating violence in schools (Special Education Services, 2000). The programme focuses on developing a school ethos, or culture, that includes collegial and cohesive staff support, participative structures and shared power, open communication, inclusive practices, and consistent procedures and policies.

Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2002) emphasised that in order to understand how schools change their cultures, the processes that are present in schools must be critically examined. This research, using qualitative case-study methods such as document analysis and interviews with the school's leadership, staff, parents and students, explores how Caversham School successfully changed its school culture through the *Eliminating Violence Programme* and links this change and programme more specifically to an action research process. The original data for this paper was gathered in 2003 as part of a study which was funded by the Ministry of Social Development. This study explored the specific initiatives that three primary schools

in New Zealand used to positively change their school cultures (Gaffney, Higgins, McCormack & Taylor, 2004). Informed consent for participation in this project was received by each participating school and the project's participants. Caversham School, which was one of these schools, also agreed that its name could be used in publications about the research.

## CHANGING SCHOOL CULTURES

A significant aim of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* is to help schools examine their cultures and change their practices, values, structures and systems that may be encouraging violent behaviour (Special Education Services, 2000). The research literature notes that a school's values and beliefs help to create its culture (MacArthur & Gaffney, 2001; Neville, 1998; Sullivan, 2000), and that this culture subsequently forms the foundation for a school's educational pedagogy, structure and relationships (Hardy, 1996; Neville, 1998). For example, Booth and Ainscow (2002) posited that schools could become inclusive by developing cultures in which all students are respected, participate, learn and achieve. In a discussion about guidelines for schools who wished to promote mental and emotional well-being, Dickinson (2001) described the World Health Organisation's approach to school change as underpinning these guidelines. This approach attends primarily to developing a positive school ethos in the whole school community.

Lewis and Andrews (2001) argued, as well, that successful change occurs when all teachers within a school share the same vision. They emphasised that school administrations need to be aligned with the teachers' pedagogy so that change can occur and be maintained. They documented an Australian secondary school's change process whose purpose was to enhance student learning. Initially, their data revealed a lack of cohesion and unclear agreement about what constituted good pedagogy. Subsequently, a group of teachers regularly met to discuss and compose a shared vision statement and an action plan for the school. This experience resulted in the formation of a professional community in which members reflected upon their practice, collaborated and learned from each other. Their vision statement for the school was also eventually shared with the entire school and members of the group later became mentors for other teachers so that teaching practice throughout the school could contribute to the new vision. Similarly, in their anti-bullying work at Selwyn College, Cheshire and Lewis (2000) found that piecemeal strategies for school change had limited success or were unsuccessful. The whole school needed to be committed to an ethos of respectful relationships.

The practice of adding curriculum and educational initiatives to change schools to meet the needs of marginalised groups, such as Māori, are unsuccessful because such strategies focus "on characteristics of individual students who flee rather than on attributes of the school from which they flee" (Fine, 1991, p. 22, cited in Adams et al., 2000, p. 298). Macfarlane (2005) noted that when schools work with Māori students, it is important to understand a Māori worldview and the central role of whānau in education. Glynn, Atvars, Berryman and O'Brien (1999) found in their report of Māori Guidance and Learning teachers that schools included some cultural

items in the curriculum such as counting in Māori and establishing a Kapa Haka group. However, across the entire curriculum Māori culture was absent and schools had limited knowledge about, or links to, the Māori community. Researchers have thus argued that schools need to be encouraged to fully engage, and consult, with their students' whānau and iwi about their educational programmes with a Māori worldview in mind before positive change can be made for Māori students (Glynn et al., 1999; Macfarlane, 2005).

Groundwater-Smith and Hunter (2000) have linked positive school change to Hargreaves' notion of a knowledge creating school. Such a school is aware of its environment; is sensitive to its educational community; recognises the knowledge of its teachers; initiates a whole school process to create knowledge; and has a culture of continual improvement. It also treats mistakes as learning opportunities and flexibly and coherently participates in planning activities (Hargreaves, 1999a, cited in Groundwater-Smith & Hunter, 2000).

Leadership is also a vital component for changing and maintaining a positive school culture (Thorburn, 1994; Zollers, Ramqanathan & Moonset, 1999). School leaders also can affect the professional development of teachers (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000; Gross, 2002; Johansson, 2001; Walter-Thomas & DiPaola, 2003). Bredeson and Johansson (2000) noted that principals are in a unique position to influence the design of professional development programmes in schools. They examined the ways that some principals positively influenced the learning of teachers. These principals understood the connection between student learning, professional development and school quality. They also tended to be open communicators and role-models for life-long learning who celebrated learning throughout their school. MacArthur and Gaffney's (2001) study of bullying and children with disabilities in New Zealand noted that principals "set the scene for supportive relationships by promoting inclusive values and practices at all levels of the school" (p. 95).

### **STARTING THE CHANGE PROCESS AT CAVERSHAM SCHOOL**

Caversham Primary School is a decile three contributing school in a low socio-economic area. In 2003, it had a roll of 90 students, and 23 percent of its students were Māori (Education Review Office, 2003). Caversham School began its school change process after a negative 1999 Education Review Office report, which said that the school's "board was not in a position to be confident that the school (was) emotionally safe for students" (Education Review Office, 1999, ¶90), and at the initiative of its new school principal. Within days of starting work at the school, the principal made contact with Special Education Services to begin the *Eliminating Violence Programme*. She saw the urgent need for change because she was unprepared for the overt level of violence in the playground. She said:

I'm a 'nice middle class person', boarding school background ... and my experience did not prepare me for what I struck ... and I arrived on my first morning and I was gobsmacked at the way the children spoke to each other and the way the parents spoke to the children and at the high level of physical interactions that mostly

were standover tactics. ... Pushing and shoving and jostling. ... On this first day, a nine year-old pushed a seven or eight year old from the top of the stairs to the bottom. Broke a front tooth, broke his collarbone. ... I thought, "I can't deal with this. I cannot work in this atmosphere" and I called the Ministry. (Principal)

The principal also stated that she believed that it was her role to lead school change because she was able to see the 'bigger' picture. Both within the action research and the whole school change process the literature has noted that those who are most affected by the research need to be involved in it (Kember, 2000; Mills, 2003). Within the *Eliminating Violence Programme*, one of two facilitators explained that the programme requires both the leadership and the entire staff's commitment to the programme. She said:

If you haven't got the leadership behind you and somebody to pick it up and run with it, then it all falls flat on its face, and that can be very frustrating, for us and for the staff members who do recognise the need for change and were prepared to invest energy in helping to improve things. (Facilitator)

Some of the staff at the school noted as well that the task of changing a school culture required a strong leader:

I mean if you do it from the bottom or from the deputy, it doesn't pull people together quite the same. ... Sometimes with (the principal) it's straight out directed by her and that's that. And that's fine too. I mean she is ultimately responsible for the school time. (Teacher)

Also, the facilitator of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* explained that the whole school involvement was integral as well to developing a common vision:

And the next step in our process, having met with the principal ... (is) to do a presentation to staff about what the programme involves. And then we take a ballot to see if there is staff support for the programme, because we won't do it unless there's a high level of support because otherwise it can be a waste of resource ... and also it can become counter-productive if the staff are not united in their vision and aims for it. (Facilitator)

The facilitator noted that some staff might feel threatened by the programme or believe that violence at school was not their problem:

It's quite threatening at a level, because it involves collecting data from the students and the parents and your colleagues on the staff about a range of issues in the school. And the risk is that some of that data will be negative in nature. ... It also involves them examining their own values and attitudes and teaching practices. So they have to be prepared to be open to reflecting on those and changing some ingrained habits or attitude. ... Apathy is

sometimes a reason. They don't see there's a huge problem, or they think it's somebody else's problem: "It's the kids' problem, not our problem. It's the parents' problem, not our problem."  
(Facilitator)

At Caversham, the entire school did get 'on board' after a vote was taken following the facilitators' presentation to the school's community. One of the facilitators described this day:

There's always a risk that they'll say, "No, we're not interested. ... So what the principal suggested, and we thought it was a great idea too, was to invite a wider segment of the school community ... The principal offered a wide-ish invitation to other segments of the school community, so that it wasn't just about the teaching staff, it was about the school and all its support services. And we give them all a ballot form ... and then we come back to the office, or usually in the car, and we open them up and they say: "yes/no". ... And they did unanimously vote in favour of the programme. (Facilitator)

The school change process at Caversham thus was initially begun by a strong leader but the whole school agreed to begin the *Eliminating Violence Programme* as well.

### **Step One: Reflecting about the Present**

Action research, itself, begins with studying and reflecting about the issue of concern. The *Eliminating Violence Programme* also begins in the same manner. At Caversham School the facilitators collected information about bullying and violence levels. They observed classrooms and the playground behaviour of students; held a number of meetings with the school community about bullying and violence; and asked the school to adapt and distribute a school-wide reflective survey about the school's culture which fitted their needs. One of the facilitators further described this step of the programme as being participatory:

The first thing that we then do is design, in consultation with the school, surveys for the staff, the parent group and the students. ... Because no two schools are the same and no two school communities are the same. And, yes, we want to find out about bullying and violence in the school, but there might be some other things that you might like to find about – or you might not like the way that these questions are worded. Or you might want to change the orders of the questions. So we let them have some control over that. (Facilitator)

The school's first survey was completed in 1999 and asked questions about the behaviour, amount of bullying and relationships at the school. It also asked its students about "hurting" at the school. Table 1 from this survey lists the percentage of children who indicated their perception of how much hurting was at Caversham

School in 1999. Over half of the students responded that they thought either there was a lot or a great deal of hurting.

**Table 1. Students' Report of Hurting at Caversham School**

	<u>1999</u>
a great deal	24%
a lot	30%
some	24%
not much	19%
none	3%

A parent in an interview for this study described an 'unwelcoming' feeling at the school before 2000. She encountered violence, anger and tension whenever she walked through the school gates:

It was like you were walking into tension, anger. And this is first thing in the morning before the school day even starts ... I guess if you relate it to what you see on the telly – the ghetto, and the gangs ... that was that sort of a tension almost. And you do feel it when you walk in through the school gates and through the kids. And it might be not so much what the kids say to each other, but the way in which it is said. The tone of the voice: it was always an angry tone and so that really does impact on you when you're walking through the school. (Parent)

The children who were surveyed in 1999 also reported that 80 percent of hurting or teasing at school occurred at play time or lunchtime. In the playground, the facilitators of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* observed the students during their lunch and interval breaks. Table 2 lists the number of behaviours that were observed.

**Table 2. Behaviours Observed During Lunch and Interval at Caversham School by *Eliminating Violence Programme* Facilitators**

<u>Behaviour</u>	<u>1999</u>
Name calling	25
Physical violence	57
Play fights	18
Threatening behaviour	7
Isolated children	8
Intentional exclusion	2
Prosocial/helping behaviour	4

The facilitators of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* also gathered data by observing teachers in playgrounds and classrooms. A facilitator noted that staff patrolled the playground instead of engaging with the children and that there were unclear behavioural expectations throughout the school. She said:

And we also observed that there were few adults in the playground... And they were walking around, but not engaging with children. They were what we would describe as 'patrolling'. ... There were some negative systems operating in classrooms, but not obvious positive consequences or incentive processes. ... And we look for any statements around the school of what the expectations for behaviour and interaction are. And we found that those weren't clearly stated either. (Facilitator)

The principal was willing to be observed teaching a class, and the facilitator noted that this encouraged other staff to be observed:

The principal said she herself would like to be observed taking a group as part of the process. Now we thought that was great because that made it safer for her staff, that she was prepared to be subjected to the same intrusion as they were. (Facilitator)

After completing these data gathering activities, the facilitators presented the results without analysis to the whole school, which then began to plan its intervention programme based on this data. One of the facilitators described this process:

We then ... present it back to the staff and whoever comes to that workshop which could include Board of Trustees members and obviously people like RTLBs, and we say: "This is your data. What do you think it means? What's it telling you? How would you – you know – where to from here? What ideas for the future and planning does this give you?" ... So we gave the school the feedback and they were, like us, quite shocked by it. (Facilitator)

### **Steps Two and Three for the School and Action Research: Planning for Change and Implementing the Plan**

The next steps within action research, and within the *Eliminating Violence Programme*, are to analyse the data and plan a programme accordingly. The results of the school's survey and the facilitators' observations were presented to the school in a meeting with the school staff and Board of Trustees. One of the facilitators emphasized that it was her role to facilitate the discussions and help them plan. In the quote below, she also remembered that the first thing that Caversham wanted to do was to develop a shared mission statement and school vision:

We're there to facilitate at all stages. We really were trying to avoid that type of top-down-expert input model, of where we facilitate reflective practice, self-development, school planning.

The first thing they wanted to do was come up with a vision for the school, with a mission statement. Some goals about what kind of a place they wanted it to be. (Facilitator)

This mission statement was:

Learning together to provide an educationally stimulating environment, where each child has the opportunities to reach his or her potential with the support of caring professionals, parents, caregivers and the community.

Given the results of their survey, the playground observations and their new shared vision, those involved with the school were determined to change and reduce its bullying and violence rates. They next worked on creating a consistent behaviour management programme, a pro-social curriculum, improved teaching practice and better ways to involve the community in the school during the meetings with the *Eliminating Violence Programme's* facilitators. The facilitator noted, however, that a momentum for change had been created and that the whole school continued to be involved. She said:

(The momentum) came from the staff themselves. They turned around quite quickly. ...They began to see that in fact, between them, they had all these years of experience and that the ... school hasn't always been like this so it didn't need to be like this in the future. There was a new young staff member who had a lot of energy who was able to say, "Well I'm sure we can do things to fix this." And the principal, herself, had just come from another school which had a supportive environment and so she had ideas about how it could be different. ... And in the end if you've got a few key people who can lead the way and model some of what you want and it starts to go in a more positive direction, you can pull those more reluctant staff along with you. And that's what happened at Caversham I think. (Facilitator)

One of the parents said that through teamwork, it was not difficult to change the school's culture:

Back then, there was a storm brewing and then it reached a head. ... With anything that you try there's always challenges but I think they were gladly met. And because we all worked together as a team I think it was easy to meet the challenge. (Parent)

The principal was also prepared to reflect on her leadership practice through the programme. She received some negative feedback from the programme's staff survey but then developed better ways of communicating with her staff:

And so with our first staff survey feedback, we got some negative feedback about the principal which is always quite hard to deal with particularly in a small school. And we gave the principal that feedback because we're obliged to do that and she found that quite stressful. But, to her credit I think, she didn't see that as a

reason to stop in terms of trying to stop the process of self-improvement but she did reflect on her own style in terms of communicating with staff. And then the next lot of data we got about the staff feelings were that communication, consultation and power sharing within the staff context had improved. (Facilitator)

Adair (1999) stated that in order to reduce bullying, programmes need to include multi-level interventions along with clear and well publicised procedures in response to bullying. Caversham developed a variety of clear and well-publicized initiatives to change the school. The specific programme which the school developed and implemented included clear rules, role modelling, environmental improvement, teaching improvements, going beyond the school gates, and celebrating the diverse nature of their school community. Below is a brief description of these initiatives. Further descriptions of these initiatives are described in Higgins (2003).

## **CAVERSHAM'S INITIATIVES**

### **1. Clear Rules and Procedures**

The school community at Caversham firstly prioritised its efforts to maintain consistency and stability within the school. The principal said that it was important to have consistent school-wide rules. One of the rules was developed directly from the playground data that the facilitators gathered. They noted that games with physical contact got “out of control”. The principal commented:

We needed school rules not classroom rules. And we sat down and we came up with five school rules. And number one is the no hitting. We talked about non-violence and all those things and there is zero tolerance of any hitting, pushing, shoving. And we banned all tackle and physical contact games. So every scrag game, everything was off, like rugby. Touch, you can play touch and things but you cannot play physical contact games. The other one was that the kids knew that they were going to have to stand to account for comments. (Principal)

The children in the focus groups all knew some of the school rules by heart. For example, the children in the nine and ten year old group said the school rules were:

Student 1: No violence, no punching

Student 2: No spitting

Student 4: Always be prepared, always be polite to teachers and adults and children

All of the children in the focus groups also knew the consequences of breaking these rules. They mentioned being spoken to by a teacher or principal, sitting on the time out seat, taking responsibility for the behaviour through written apologies,

getting detention, and being suspended. There were also rules developed for using the stairs because of safety reasons.

## 2. Role Models

At Caversham, the teachers recognised that they, themselves, and older students, were also leaders and role models to children at the school. One of the teachers stated that because teachers cared and demonstrated good relationships, this, in turn, encouraged children to develop positive relationships:

I think the children here see both men and women, in terms of our staff here. They see them relating well. They see them laughing. They see them having fun. They know that their teachers are very caring and concerned. Teachers go the extra length for camps and sporting trips. And I think they view that as very positive. (Teacher)

The principal was also described as a role model. One teacher said:

She was out there and knew exactly what was going on, and was proactive in dealing with anything that was looking like it might arise or might happen. So it became a teaching thing, a sharing thing, so that those things weren't allowed to happen, because they were pre-empted and dealt with before they became issues. And so she is a tremendously hard worker but not just in the office ... out in the playground, making sure she knew what was going on everywhere with those kids, so led very much by example. (Teacher)

The principal also noted that Māori advisors were involved in the *Eliminating Violence Programme* meetings and that role models were sought from the Māori and Pasifika communities:

The resource teachers of Māori are based at our school. So we had Māori input at all steps, like when we had whole staff meetings, they were there as well. Part of our acknowledgement is that we want, where possible, young Māori or PI role models. (Principal)

One role model was a young Māori activities coordinator who was employed to teach and supervise constructive play within the playground. The principal stated:

We employed a youngish Māori guy as our playground activities coordinator. So we had a guy out there who, he wasn't a police role at all, he was the person who says "Hey, you want to play soccer? Let's get the teams even. I'll play with these guys. Now whose turn is it?" (Principal)

### **3. Improving the Environment**

The principal and school were also able to secure funding through Ministry of Education (MOE) initiatives and fundraising activities to improve the physical environment at the school:

(The MOE) spent money on upgrading our interior of our school. I mean we are not talking posh remodel. ... But we're talking pin board instead of flakey paint plaster. ... They had to put one lot of new carpet down but the rest of the carpet remained. But we painted and spruced up and made our environments look fresh and clean and new. They redid the toilet blocks so they don't smell anymore. And they are actually tasteful and nice. (Principal)

One teacher commented that such improvements were positive and helped the school to become more welcoming:

When you've got a nice carpet that isn't all spotty and coffee stained, it's sort of welcoming isn't it? Chairs that haven't got all the stuffing falling out, you know, I mean those sort of things were positive. (Teacher)

### **4. Improving Teaching**

The school developed a strategic plan which provided a direction for the school. The staff contributed to a school curriculum plan and professional development was offered to teachers as well. Subject advisors were contracted by the school from the Dunedin College of Education to assist teachers in curriculum development and planning. One teacher said this resulted in an improved school culture because she was better prepared:

Oh lots of professional development for the teachers. In the English plan. Maths, numeracy. Knowing where you're heading, makes a huge difference to the overall culture because when you don't know what you're doing ... you don't feel right anyway. And that then impacts on your teaching, impacts on the children, but having that made a huge difference. (Teacher)

### **5. Beyond the Gates**

Caversham School's staff and families, local voluntary organisations and local businesses all believed that the education of children went beyond traditional ideas about classroom and school practice in that children needed to have their physical and emotional needs met before they could learn. A social worker in schools was hired in 2000 to work with the children and their families. The principal also noted that if children were hungry, they would not be able to learn. A food programme was begun so that food could be provided at the school. Also, educational programmes which took the children beyond the school gates were also regularly

implemented. One teacher explained that this contrasted to the past when the school was not able to take school trips because of the children's behaviour:

We've taken the whole school out to Warrington for a rocky shore study. We wouldn't have done that before. You'd be worried about a child who would take off, because they didn't get their own way. So that's a big thing. And we took the whole school to Woodhaugh Gardens earlier on in the year. They all went. The whole lot. It wouldn't have happened earlier on. (Teacher)

The principal also involved the community in its 'out of school' activities:

I also try and put a whole heap of community things into our school. For example, in our healthy ways of being and doing, we have a school walk. ... We had a picnic lunch, and advertised and offered mini bus transport to any parents with preschoolers that wanted to come and walk with us, or just meet us there for lunch, or anything. ... And the children were across school groups so that you walked in a whānau group that involved everybody. (Principal)

## **6. Celebrating Diversity**

Cultural diversity was also celebrated and acknowledged at the school. The principal noted that each year an evening school production was dedicated to such a celebration:

We have a day when we celebrate our different ethnicities in an assembly day. And if you want to wear national costume that day, good on you....And it's encouraged. One of our nights for our school production, one of the parts of it was celebration of diversity....And we invited parents to come up if the mum wanted to speak or sing or just stand there while their child wore national costume. (Principal)

Funding was also secured during one year to pay for a professional Māori director to help a school production that celebrated the life of Delcelia Witika, a two-year old Māori child, who died in 1991 from child abuse.

The principal said that the school also recognised that formal community consultation meetings may not be appropriate for Pacific Island or Māori families who may feel threatened by formal meetings. Instead, the principal visited each Māori family along with a Māori Board of Trustee member. The principal said:

We are trying to involve the community but not consultation meetings or buzz groups. It's just not the way. With our Māori kids community consultation was home-based. Our Māori Board of Trustee member and I home-visited every family. (Principal)

### Steps Four and Five: Evaluating the Results and Beginning Again

The last steps in an action research cycle involve reflecting on the results of the implemented plan, changing the plan accordingly and beginning the research again. In 2000, the facilitators of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* surveyed Caversham School's community to see if their initiatives were having an effect on the violence and bullying rates at the school. Also, later in 2003, the school itself decided to distribute the survey again to see if the programme had made a difference over a significant period of time. The results of these surveys were favourable. Students reported less hurting at the school in 2000 and in 2003 (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Students' Report of Hurting at Caversham School in 1999, 2000 & 2003**

	<u>Before <i>Eliminating Violence (EV) Programme</i></u>		<u>After <i>EV Programme</i></u>	
	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2003</u>
a great deal	24%	4%	8%	
a lot	30%	16%	15%	
some	24%	41%	29%	
not much	19%	35%	36%	
none	3%	4%	12%	

In 2000, the facilitators of the *Eliminating Violence Programme* also returned again to carry out playground and interval observations. The bullying and violent behaviours had decreased significantly as Table 4 indicates.

**Table 4. Behaviours Observed During Lunch and Interval at Caversham School by *Eliminating Violence Programme* Facilitators**

	<u>Before <i>EV Programme</i></u>		<u>After <i>EV Programme</i></u>	
	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2003</u>
Name calling	25	3	3	
Physical violence	57	3	3	
Play fights	18	3	3	
Threatening behaviour	7	0	0	
Isolated children	8	0	0	
Intentional exclusion	2	0	0	
Prosocial/helping behaviour	4	6	6	

The board, principal and teachers ... have focused in recent months on promoting a safe physical and emotional environment for students. The principal has been proactive in seeking the support of outside agencies. Input from Special Education Services has resulted in the implementation of an “Eliminating Violence” programme. There has not yet been a formal review of this programme, but parents and staff already speak positively of the improvements in student behaviour. (Education Review Office, 2000, ¶20)

The report also praised the teachers for responding to the challenge of improving curriculum delivery:

Teachers have worked hard to develop school guidelines in three essential learning areas during 1999. This represents significant progress in addressing the curriculum concerns of the last report ... Teachers have worked with curriculum advisors and resource teachers to develop plans in social studies and Te Reo Māori that are due for review at the end of the year. The curriculum action plan sets out a timeline for the development of school-wide programmes in the remaining curriculum areas of english, health and physical education and the arts. When this curriculum development is completed, implemented and evaluated, the board could be assured that students receive their educational entitlement. (Education Review Office, 2000, ¶34)

When the data were gathered for this research in 2003, an older focus group of children, aged 9 and 10, who were at the school when the *Eliminating Violence Programme* began, commented about the changes at the school:

Student 3: When I was about six years old, there was heaps of bullies here. They used to be on the tower. They used to fight and stuff. Used to be like a wrestling ring. They'd push everybody off ...

Student 1: Yeah!

Student 2: When I first came to this school, I was really freaked because ... as soon as I walked into class, I ran back outside. 'Cause there were too many kids. And I was shy and I knew some people and then [Student 3] came out and got me. And said, “Come with me.” And I said, “Do you want to be my friend?”

Student 3: And then we started playing and stuff.

Student 2: And then when we went up to the high towers ...

Student 3: These two kids ... I barely escaped and then, um, this kid grabs us and he goes, “grrr.”

Student 2: He was like grabbing us and things and pulling us up against, and that is how the fight started ...

Student 3: Then we went to our teacher and he got time out for that week.

Student 2: More than that. It was about three weeks ...

Researcher: So did it change over time? Is it better now?

Student 3: Yep. Yep. It's changed. Dramatically.

The school also seemed to be achieving its Mission Statement as well. Four children, who were aged 8 and 9 and comprised another focus group, reported that they had very positive relationships and were learning at the school:

Student 1: They always look after you when you get hurt

Student 2: You're not bossed around

Student 3: The best thing about Caversham School is when you come, you have friends and you don't feel lonely

Student 4: You have play time and lunch times

Student 3: And you get food and you get treats and you get to go on trips. ... You can do interesting things like you can talk on this tape recorder ...

Student 4: When you are injured you can have friends. They look after you. They don't get smart. ... You get heaps of love

Student 3: You get helped by teachers and you turn smart, smart, smart and you go to high school

Student 4: Then you go to university

In this study, the facilitator of the programme noted that when she now visited the school that she felt it was calmer and inclusive. She also said that the school had fewer referrals to Group Special Education.

Caversham School continued to implement and refine the initiatives which were introduced in 1999 and by 2003 the initiatives were just an ongoing part of the school's programmes and culture. One of the teachers at the school stated that he believed that the positive culture at Caversham now maintains itself:

It's a very accepting, caring sort of community. And that's traditionally been a strength of Caversham except for that short little period where it all went to custard. ... It's an attitude. ... If you can find positive ways of (students) getting attention, get success, feel good about themselves, then those behaviours will disappear. (Teacher)

The school, also through its 2003 survey, intended to re-examine the initiatives which it introduced to change its culture. This, within action research, is the last

step in a research cycle but further research cycles then begin in an unending spiral. Similarly, one of the *Eliminating Violence Programme*'s facilitators explained that the programme is a process that has no end point:

Your school community changes as your students change, your staff change, you know your senior management team changes, and the business of reflective practice is a never ending enterprise. And school culture is a movable feast. It's a changing beast. So I think you've got to keep chipping away at it, keep it on the agenda, and realise that your culture, your ethos, is integral to everything else that you do. (Facilitator)

## CONCLUSION

Caversham School positively changed its whole school involvement in the *Eliminating Violence Programme*, which is also a programme that mirrors the action research process. This change was initiated by a strong, democratic and reflective leader who was, as Zollers et al. (1999) noted, integral to the school's positive culture. She was able to lead the culture change at the school through consultation, role modelling and her own learning as a leader (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000).

By using the *Eliminating Violence Programme*, the school was able to reflect on the violence and bullying at the school; develop and implement a whole school programme based on this reflection; evaluate its programme; and begin the process again. The whole school was committed to positive change and valued the creation of a culture that did not tolerate bullying but instead valued diversity. The school also made a concerted effort to address the needs of its Māori students through meaningful consultation with whānau, role-modelling and integrating Māori culture in its educational programmes, as also suggested in the literature (Glynn et al., 1999; Macfarlane, 2005).

The school's culture is now respectful, kind, non-violent and responsible. Booth and Ainscow (2002) would describe such a school as an inclusive school that celebrated success and strived to give all its children a high quality education. These values were expressed by both the children and staff at the school. For example, the five and six year old children's focus group, when asked what made them feel good or safe at school, mentioned kindness, protective friends, helpful staff and the rules that protected them:

Student 2: Because it's cool

Student 3: People be kind. ...

Student 2: And because if you get hurt and you go to [the school secretary]

Student 4: Because your friends look after you. ...

Student 2: Because it's fun

Student 1: Because it's safe

Student 3: And you're not allowed to go out of the school grounds either because you'll get told off

The staff and parents at the school also praised the students for their contribution to the friendly and caring school culture in the quote below:

At lunchtime today – there's a wee girl that slipped over in the ice and these three other little girls picked her up and rubbed her knees and took her off somewhere to sit in the sun and they just looked after her, and they were the slightly older ones. And that's the kind of culture that we have now, which is very good.  
(Teacher)

Such welcoming, caring, positive, safe and inclusive school cultures provide immeasurable benefits to all of our children. Children in such schools are valued, respected and supported, and research has demonstrated that school leadership is a vital factor in initiating and maintaining these cultures. Jorgenson (1998) noted that "when people's hearts change, their heads usually follow" (p. xxi). Caversham School has also made progress in regards to improving its educational programmes (Education Review Office, 2003). In conclusion, the *Eliminating Violence Programme* and, by implication, action research should thus be considered useful tools which can successfully create change and positively improve the educational experiences of New Zealand students.

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[www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/positive-school-culture.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/positive-school-culture.html).

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