

Restorative Practices in Catholic School Communities

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Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne Australia supports 254 co-educational primary schools (Prep – Year 6) which are parish-based in the local community. There are 66 co-ed and single sex secondary schools which are either regionally based under the governance of a cluster of parishes or religious order systemic schools.

Student Wellbeing Strategy

The Vision Statement from the Strategy Plan of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) refers to *‘ensuring that students are prepared for their present and future lives as independent persons empowered to contribute to the common good of society as active citizens.’*

Restorative Practices is a portfolio within the Student Wellbeing Unit of the CEOM. The Unit is designed to address a range of opportunities and needs in schools within an evidence-based framework emphasising prevention and a whole school approach.

The Student Wellbeing Strategy is strongly related to the promotion of social emotional wellbeing to improve student learning outcomes. Student Wellbeing aims to develop quality relationships that promote school improvement, where students consistently demonstrate behaviour that reflects an integration of Gospel teachings. The link to restorative practices can be clearly articulated.

Staff from the Student Wellbeing group assist schools to review frameworks related to social emotional wellbeing and pastoral care, develop classroom management programs, implement a range of programs related to social emotional wellbeing and support in the development of case management of students with behavioural issues.

Social and Emotional Competence

The link between social emotional wellbeing and academic learning is an important factor that staff adhere to in their service provision to schools. We know that:

‘Students who behave in more pro-social ways and demonstrate higher levels of social competency also achieve more highly’ (McGrath 2005) and

‘Educational outcomes are likely to be improved when emotional wellbeing is enhanced’ (Zubrick, 1997).

Students who are socially competent are more likely to have productive relationships with their teachers and peers. If they manage effective social interaction then skills such as problem solving are enhanced. These skills could include the managing of negative emotions, goal setting, thinking about the rights of others and persistence.

Links to National Frameworks

In Australia there are three National Frameworks that all schools – Government, Catholic and Independent – are mandated and funded to implement. They are:

National Safe Schools 2004 – ongoing
National Values Education 2005- 2008
National Drug Education 2000 – ongoing

To support schools in the implementation of these frameworks there are curriculum resources, professional learning, funding and parent / community partnership opportunities. Many schools have used these resources as a doorway to introducing restorative practices into the ethos and operations of the school.

For example a cluster of schools who related values education to restorative practices explained:

Restorative Practices have dovetailed neatly into values education. The culture of the school, particularly within the values of caring and respect has strengthened significantly. The social skills program, together with regular positive and public acknowledgement of students demonstrating the school values, has complemented Restorative Practices.

(Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools Report – Stage 1 2006).

Restorative Practices in Catholic School Communities

In 2002 a pilot of seven primary and secondary schools in Government and Catholic schools implemented Restorative Practices. The pilot was evaluated by the University of Melbourne and documented a number of achievements as well as challenges that schools had found. Strategies were then implemented to grow the practices across regions, offering ongoing professional learning to support maintenance. At a school level the introduction and sustainability was managed by a core team which included leadership and student wellbeing representation to introduce a whole school approach.

Since 2002, 48 primary and 20 secondary schools have introduced restorative practices with the support of the student wellbeing team.

The CEOM objectives in assisting school to introduce restorative practices are:

- The skilling of the school community in the successful resolution of conflict
- The prevention of dysfunctional conflict and harm in CEOM schools
- The demonstration of Catholic values in the forgiveness and restoration of community members after breaches in relationships
- The demonstration of the values of equity, respect and inclusivity

Models of Delivery

It is a school-based decision as to when a school introduces restorative practices. Their interest is first expressed by attending an introductory session linked to the cyclic School Improvement Plan which includes a component on student wellbeing. After the Readiness phase is completed, the core team attends two-days of professional learning.

Middle management of the school can also participate in professional learning around restorative mediation and meetings and there are skill up-dates for whole staff or smaller groups around listening skills, Circle Time, Affective questioning, conflict management over a two year period.

New staff at schools already part of the restorative practices process are also accommodated early in the year so that they are fully aware of the philosophy and principles of restorative justice and can more easily fit into the culture of the school.

The Readiness Phase occurs after schools have completed their four-year cyclical review – a component of which is student wellbeing. As part of the CEOM Student Wellbeing Strategy, all primary schools now employ a coordinator who forms a professional learning team to drive the strategy. They develop an understanding of the philosophy of restorative justice through literature, an information session, network clusters, SWAP website (www.edfac.unimelb.edu/swap) and make a commitment to documenting the practices into their Annual Action Plan. The school then establishes a link with the Student Wellbeing Team at the CEOM to be part of the professional learning and promoting engagement of all staff.

A two-day professional learning session takes place in the **Introductory Phase** which is attended by the core team. They are responsible for developing an Action Plan of introduction for the whole school using multiple sources of data collection – this could include:

- reviewing current policies, practices and programs around behaviour management

- examining baseline data from surveys with regard to positive classroom climate and relationships to determine goals
- evaluating links between current practices and restorative practices
- consulting with staff as to their readiness

Audit tools have been developed to assist schools in this readiness phase.

In the **Implementation Phase** the core team effectively implements the Action Plan over a two-year period. Professional learning opportunities are continued for new staff in schools, how to run restorative meetings, restorative mediation techniques as well as conflict management and cognitive coaching skills.

During this phase it is important that the core team ensures staff are engaged and feeling confident in using restorative language as well as having access to the support they need to embed the practices as part of the school culture. The Wellbeing team is at present preparing resources for schools to use in the form of powerpoint presentations suitable for staff meetings or half day professional learning and a DVD on how to run a Parent Night.

Parent Engagement and Student Involvement

One of our schools has invited parents including new Prep parents for 2008 to an evening to explain their practices in dealing with conflict and inappropriate behaviour. The current students are modelling a **Circle Time** for parents and then asking them to participate in a Circle to give them the opportunity to experience what it is like to listen and contribute ideas to a discussion about an issue. They will also model the use of **Affective Questions** for parents and give parents a copy of the questions to assist them in their parenting skills.

Students are also being taught how to engage in active listening through the use of affective questions in the playground so they become peer supporters in managing minor incidents.

Accreditation Stages

There are four stages for schools to process and then meet specific benchmarks to apply for accreditation. They are:

- To introduce and implement restorative practices in the school community
- Use of multiple sources of feedback (data collection) on the effectiveness of restorative practices
- Quality professional learning to meet school community needs
- Belief by the school community that the school has a restorative justice culture

Research suggests that school improvement needs to incorporate into its measurement instruments and processes a focus on more affective and social domains. This is in keeping with the Victorian Essential Learning

School improvement needs to focus on the culture of schools including values, interpersonal relationships and interaction processes.

(Leonard, Burke & Schofield 2004)

School is the organisation of most relevance to young people and a sense of connectedness to school is in itself distinguished as a key protective factor for young people. (Fuller 1998)

So it is important that schools carefully examine their culture of policies, ethos and practices as a whole school against the benchmarks before applying for accreditation and becoming a Restorative Practice School.

Sample 2-day Professional Learning Program

Day 1

Background – historical overview
fundamental concepts
restorative justice philosophy according to Gospel values

Social Control Window (Watchel)

Restorative Practices classroom – what does it look / sound like

Principles of Restorative Justice

Continuum of Strategies

Enabling change in schools

Language of Choice – affective questions / affective statements
adversarial vs restorative language

Core purpose of teaching – control vs relationship
school connectedness
school culture

Day 2

Revise Social Control Window

Continuum of Strategies

Building Social Capital

Role of the Facilitator – getting started
whole school implementation
readiness / raising awareness
maintenance / sustainability

Action Plan for the future – individual school's core team planning

Future Directions

A research paper on Restorative Practices has just been completed to be made available to schools. A resource DVD and powerpoint presentation for core teams to use with staff are also in the making.

Restorative Practices is a continuing initiative of the Student Wellbeing strategy and it is hoped that all school across the Archdiocese will introduce and embed the practices so

that students are given every opportunity to be affirmed in their dignity and worth, confirmed in their personhood, and assisted to grow to the fullness of their potential.

(CECV Pastoral Care policy 1-14, 1994)