

Growing Restorative Practices with System Support in the Australian Capital Territory - Faye Bormann, Project Officer for the ACT Department of Education and Training

(notes from Power Point Presentation)

The Australian Capital Territory is very small compared to the rest of the states in Australia. There are 96 primary and high schools and 8 colleges (Years 11 and 12). In 2004 an Australian National Government Initiative, *The National Safe Schools Framework*, was presented to schools as a framework for achieving physical and emotional safety and wellbeing for all students in Australian schools. Using this framework, schools complete an audit using six key elements of good practice.

Where do Restorative Practices fit? The framework notes that restorative practices is one way to provide support to students. On examination it was found that restorative practices could be embedded in all key elements. The key elements are:

- School Values, Ethos, Culture, Structure and Student Welfare
- Policies, Programmes and Procedures
- Provision of Education/Training
- Managing Incidents of Abuse/Victimisation
- Providing Support for Students
- Working Closely with Parents

To provide professional learning opportunities to support the framework, the Australian National Government provided 3 million dollars. The funding was pro-rata according to the size of the states and the ACT received \$32,000.

Individual schools or school clusters can access funding on application to the department from a Professional Learning Fund. A school cluster includes a high school and geographically located feeder primary schools. This year one cluster has used this funding to develop a combined approach to implementation of restorative practices. All layers of the pyramid are being addressed with the inclusion of Boy Friendly Classrooms based on the work of Greg Griffiths a consultant from Western Australia.

Fiona Macgregor, Manager of Student Support Services, had widely researched restorative practices and was a strong advocate for the practice.

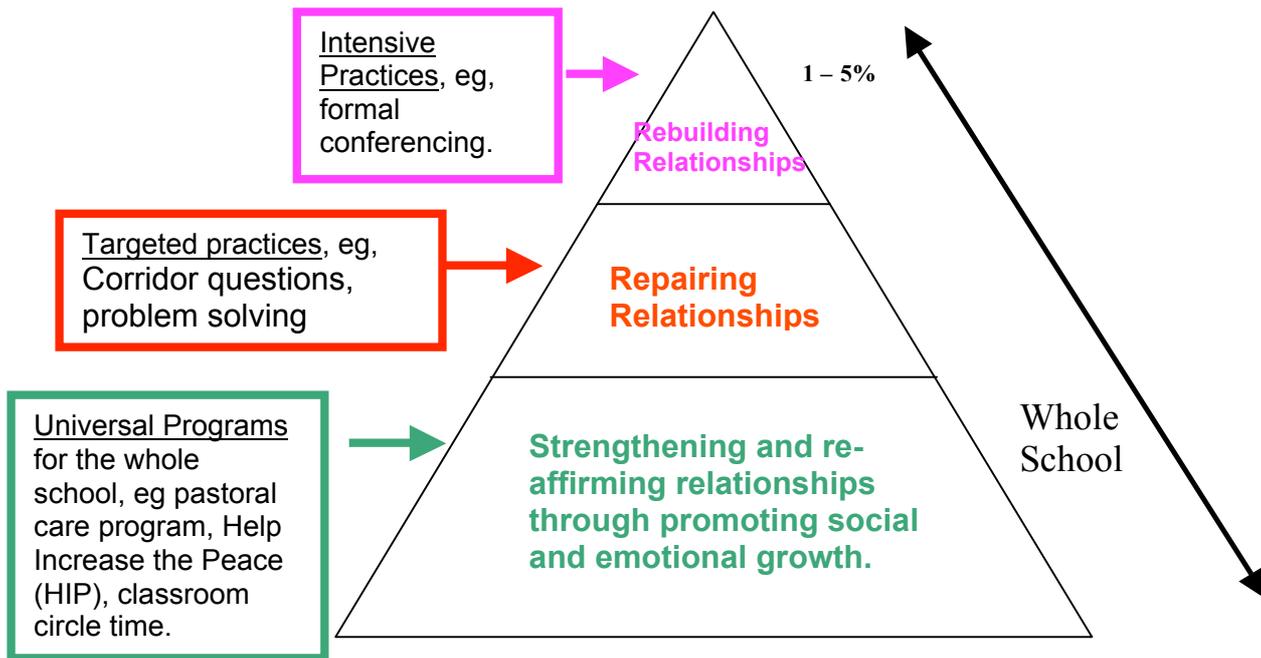
It was decided to use some of this funding to provide support for those schools that were keen to implement restorative practices.

In 2004 the strategic plan was to:

- appoint a project officer
- engage an external consultant, Peta Blood, Circle Speak, Sydney to train Student Management Consultants (SMCs) and teaching staff in restorative practices
- appoint a leading teacher (from the SMCs) whose project was to support schools in RP. Terri is featured in a video clip in this presentation and was an obvious choice for this role as she is currently doing her masters degree in restorative practices.

Each of these people had key roles in providing the support that schools needed to begin implementation and sustain practice.

In one day training sessions, Peta Blood introduced teachers to the *Pyramid of Practices*, emphasizing that schools need to be working at each level of the pyramid as they developed a whole school approach.



Source: Morrison (2005): Building Safe and Healthy School Communities IIRP conference

The bottom layer of the pyramid was extremely important as the programs within it developed connectedness and strengthened relationships across the whole school. This is congruent with our department's commitment to inclusivity.

In November 2004, Belinda Hopkins and Peta facilitated a 2-day Circle Time training. This was extremely successful and similar trainings by Peta took place throughout 2005. Circle Time took on a varied framework with teachers seeing it as a valuable way to deliver curriculum content and at the same time strengthen relationships. A 'train the trainer' model became popular with participants in Peta's courses training staff in their own schools.

Circle Time helped restorative practices to grow from the grass roots. Some schools are now using the circle time framework to run staff meetings. People were at first sceptical if it would work for Kindergarten students but when introduced this myth was quickly dispelled. (A video clip was shown of a Kindergarten class which had only been operating this way for 2 months). The teacher was very happy with the process and became one of the 'train the trainers'.

The middle layer of the pyramid was addressed in Peta's one day training sessions. The Leading Teacher and the Project Officer provided practice using the relational questions. Schools where teachers practised the questions to solve day-to-day issues on the run in the playground found that the number of people ending up at the principal's door diminished significantly.

Classroom problem solving circles are just beginning to be used as a means of solving issues where more than one person may have been harmed. Margaret Thorsborne's model has been successfully used for this (using *Restorative Practices in Classrooms – Rethinking Behaviour Management* by Margaret Thorsborne and David Vinegrad).

The best model has been where teachers have worked at all levels of the pyramid. Some schools use executive staff to release teachers to conference students. This is consistent with establishing and building relationships and helping to repair harm when it occurs.

Peta trains staff for the top level of the pyramid in her two-day conference facilitation training. These are trainings run on a regular basis throughout the year.

Successful implementation relies on one, two (or more in the case of a large school), key people being trained in the facilitation of a formal conference. In early days teachers had to change from the mindset that every issue needed a conference.

Case management, which includes individual learning plans, is an approach used by the student management consultants in partnership with the school and fits well with restorative practices. A collaborative approach is adopted and may also involve counsellors and people from outside agencies.

The challenge was to move away from suspension for wrongdoing to using alternative approaches, depending on the incident. (moving from the authoritarian to the restorative or relational window in the social control window) The effects of suspensions were being more seriously considered. Suspensions still occur when there is an issue of safety.

However, as a result of restorative practices we have noticed that suspensions have reduced in length in some schools as it became obvious that it is not desirable to wait more than a day to run a conference – particularly with younger children.

As restorative practices becomes more established, formal conferences are only used for high-level misbehavior or re-entry after a period of suspension.

(Video clip showing a Year 9 student who was being regularly suspended due to his explosive reactions and violent behaviour). This student speaks about how suspensions did not help him – he just went home, slept through the day and came back feeling more angry at everyone.

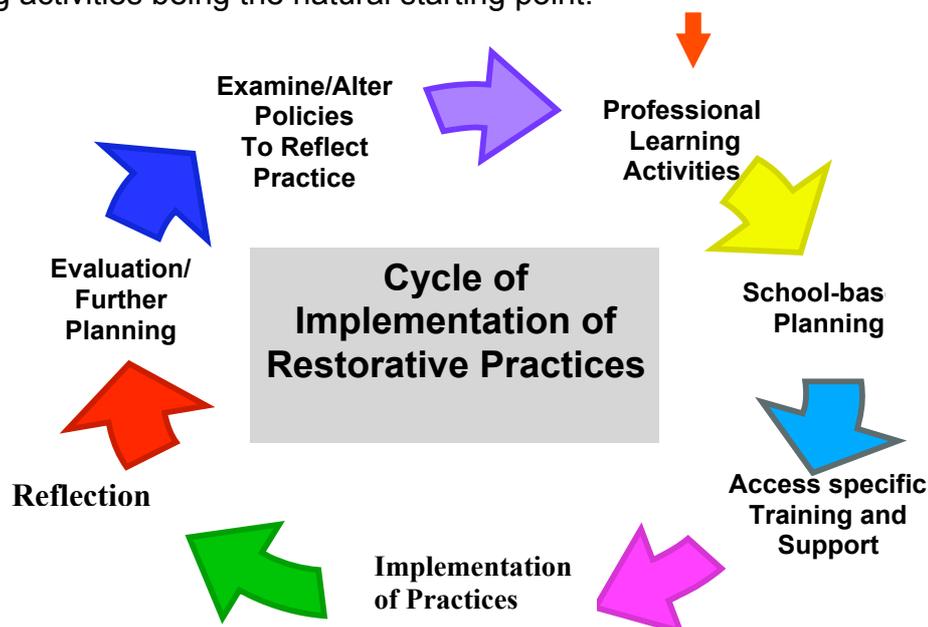
(Video clip showing the Student Management Consultant who worked with the school, the student and his parents)

The Student Management Consultant speaks about the two pronged approach used by the school – using an Individual Learning Plan, engaging the staff and using the relational approach when conflict occurred. The staff changed their approach and the student began to manage his reaction to conflict and his behaviour towards others.

(Video Clip showing the student again – 4 months later) This time we see a very happy, positive boy who had not been suspended all term. He also has a goal to complete his education – something that may have seriously been in jeopardy before the intervention and change in approach.

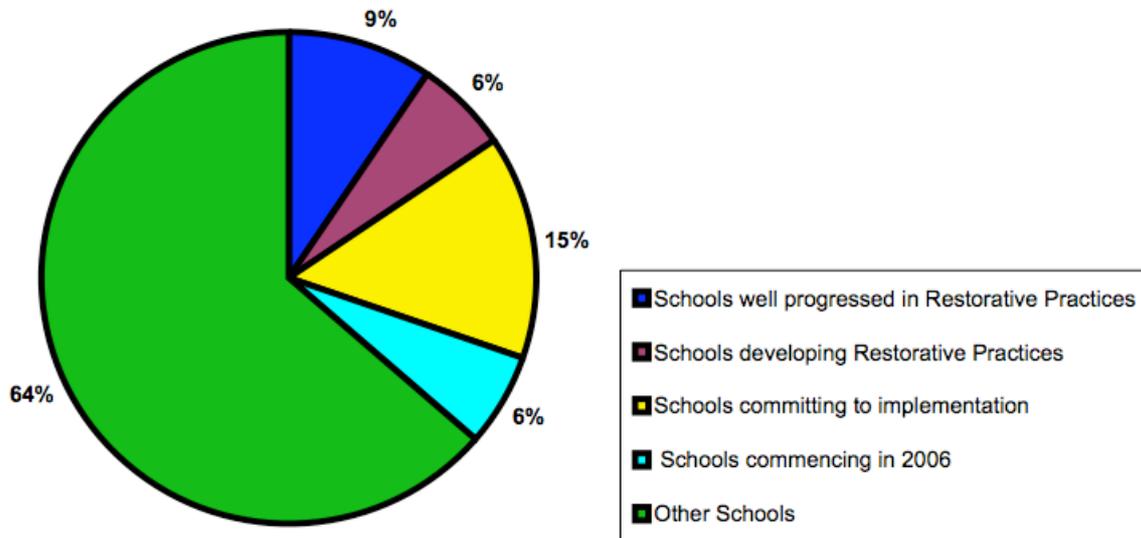
Teachers from his school are now working at all levels of the pyramid and the outcome for the students is a positive one.

For schools in the ACT the cycle of implementation looked like this with professional learning activities being the natural starting point.



Where are we now?

Restorative Practices in ACT schools since 2004



It is not the intention of the ACT Department of Education and Training to mandate restorative practices for all schools but instead to support schools wishing to work in this way.

School based management in the ACT allows for schools to adopt programs and develop policies according to their particular needs, and all schools will have an initiative that addresses the requirement of Safe Schools.

(Explanation of above chart)

Green section: Schools using good practice and a wide range of programs to build social and emotional growth.

The blue section represents schools that are well on the way. They have held whole school introductory and/or training sessions, have key staff trained in formal processes, have an implementation team, are implementing circles and other social and emotional initiatives and have an overall plan.

The maroon section represents schools that have had whole school introductions, have an implementation team and are implementing some of the practices.

The yellow section: some have had whole school introductory sessions (or a planning to), have had key staff trained and do practise restoratively to varying degrees.

The aqua section: schools coming on board in 2006.

For cultural change to happen we know it may take 3 - 5 years. We also know that once we get 10 - 20% of schools practising in a particular way we have tipping point - then a ripple effect happens.

We are only two years down the track and are feeling confident that credible models are developing which will assist in the growth of restorative practices to create safe and supportive environments for our students.

Faye Bormann