

SWAP : Student Wellbeing Action Partnership

Implementing Restorative Practices : Changing a Personal and School Culture

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This paper was prepared for partial fulfilment of the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Student Welfare), Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, 2006. It has been written in accordance with the ethical standards of confidentiality and anonymity of the persons and organisations involved and has been further modified for online use. The purpose of this paper is to provide educators with general information and examples of issues related to student wellbeing and does not necessarily represent the views of CEOM or the University of Melbourne. CEOM and the University of Melbourne do not accept liability for inaccuracies, misrepresentations, omissions or errors in information referenced in the paper or the citations. CEOM and the University of Melbourne gratefully acknowledges the author for making the action research available for public use.

School Profile

Sector – Department of Education

Type – Primary / Co-educational

Setting – Outer Metropolitan / Rural

Size – 251-500 students

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to use the action research model to reflect on the process of implementing restorative practices in my classroom.

The school has implemented skills programs which support the development of socially and emotionally competent students. Our current behaviour management system failed to grasp the opportunity to reinforce these skills in times of real conflict. After training in restorative practices, I involved my students in a process which asked them to evaluate how confident they felt in being able to have their say in times of conflict with their teacher and/or peers.

Using a variety of data collections including anecdotal evidence, continuums, drawings and informal discussions, I concluded the students needed to develop conflict resolution skills and had a preference for a system that aimed to heal rather than blame. Personal reflections revealed the difficulty in applying a range of restorative practices in the context of the classroom as well as the positive benefits it had for many students. Implementing a restorative practice inevitably widened to include students from other grades and created interest amongst their teachers.

Perceptions of the current behaviour management system, collected in a survey, revealed that staff were basically satisfied with the current system but were willing to explore restorative practices in order to make improvements.

Action research was effective in providing data that was non emotive and showed how the current system is failing to make a difference in the social and emotional learning of numerous students.

Outcomes from this process highlight that small changes to our current behaviour management process helped with the implementation of restorative practices but there are fundamental challenges ahead for both teachers and students in developing new skills and practices which confront traditional roles.

Introduction

Nothing can be more challenging for a teacher than teaching a student who has a history of creating disharmony and conflict in the classroom. When this behaviour manifests itself in the first four weeks of school and the advice that is generally given to teachers is to punish, you question if this was going to benefit the student or the school community in general.

The traditional discipline policy of "apportioning blame, establishing which school rule has been violated and making wrongdoers accountable by punishing them" (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005, p.3) has failed to make a difference in this student's social conscience. It is a discipline policy that is based on a belief that making a student feel worse through punishment will somehow make them better (Neilson, 1999).

This system of behaviour management through enforcing a known set of rules and consequences is the accepted practice in western society. "Punishment is usually seen as the most appropriate response to crime and to wrongdoing in schools, families and workplaces," (Watchel, 1999). The choices in this system of discipline are limited to punish or not, and to the severity of the punishment.

As an educator I have come to question the relevance of this system and how it equates with current educational theory that it is part of the school's responsibility to develop socially and emotionally competent students which in turn will effectively increase academic achievement. (Elias, 2005; Bernard, 2006; Roberts, 2006) make the point that "student wellbeing and successful learning outcomes are inextricably linked" (p.6).

The Victorian Department of Education has developed the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) 2005 in which it espouses the importance of developing "the skills and strategies to manage and resolve conflict in a sensible, fair and effective manner and not see it as something to avoid or eliminate." (p.15)

Our current behaviour management system can be described as traditional and it can be argued that it has been ineffective in helping some students develop the skills of conflict resolution as this system doesn't engage students in meaningful conflict resolution dialogue. The students, according to the VELs (2005) need to be actively involved in the behaviour management procedure so they can develop the skills needed to reduce, avoid and resolve conflict.

A restorative practice focuses on restoring the relationships that have been damaged by conflict and misbehaviour. Restorative practice aims to "engage students in meaningful dialogue" (Thorsborne & Vinegard, 2004 p.11) in order to change behaviour. Through restorative practice the wrongdoers are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and work together with the community that has been affected to repair the harm done. Using restorative practices develops the skills of conflict resolution.

Restorative practices introduces an element of fairness to the discipline system as the process encourages all those involved to actively search for ways to resolve the conflict.

My aim is to engage in a process of action research to educate myself and the school community about the benefits of implementing restorative practice. In doing so I will discuss how it has been addressed at my school in changing attitudes, implementing policy development and practical application.

This paper will describe how the principles of restorative justice practices are being applied, discusses and evaluates its effectiveness and suggests implications for the school community.

Context

The school has a stable, experienced staff, many of whom live and socialise in the local community. The school has a history of being innovative and forward thinking.

Vision

With restorative practices, I envisage a school community culture where

- Relationships are as important as academic outcomes
- Conflict is seen as an opportunity for those involved to learn conflict resolution and problem solving skills
- Classroom management practices are fair and democratic
- Wrongdoers are supported and retain a sense of self-worth

Initial Aims

The initial aim of this research project is to increase the teachers' understanding of the benefits of using restorative practices in managing student misconduct and conflict and enhance the learning of social and emotional problem solving techniques. This aim aligns itself with the school improvement area in the School Charter 2005-2007.

Long Term Goals

The long term goals of this project are,

- To include restorative practices into the Student Code of Conduct.
- To change the school's discipline procedure from a punitive to a more reflective, restorative practice.
- To encourage the use of restorative practices as a well developed and understood method of handling student conflict by teachers, students and parents.

Short Term Goals

This paper will address the following short term goals in 2 cycles

Cycle 1 – Reflecting on my classroom practice.

Duration- Six Weeks

- To increase my own knowledge of the steps involved in using restorative practice
- To implement restorative practices in my classroom and supervision duties.
- To increase my students and parents' knowledge of the steps involved in using restorative practice.

Cycle 2 – Engaging Others.

- Increase the teachers' awareness of inadequacies in our current behaviour management system.
- Increase the teachers' understanding and use of restorative practices as an effective strategy in student behaviour management.
- To continue to acquire restorative practices skill and conflict resolution skills for myself and my students.

Duration- Five weeks and incomplete at the time of submission

Author's role and collaborative group

As a grade 4 classroom teacher I have a responsibility to evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of classroom management and strategies for dealing with disruptive behaviours. A disruptive learning environment can impact negatively on student learning. (The Blue Print for Government Schools, 2004) There are students within my grade as well as within the wider school community that continue to use unacceptable, disruptive behaviours despite the consistent application of the current behaviour management system.

My role is to be a change agent working in the school to implement restorative practices effectively in the classroom and in doing so reflect publicly on the process. I aim to support and gain the trust of the teachers, not as the one with all the answers but as a teacher who understands the benefits in theory and is trying to

incorporate it into the very complex social and curriculum focussed life in the classroom (Langdon & Marshall 1998). I aim to promote professional discussion, listen empathically to concerns, link current teacher practice with where we aim to go and be open and non-judgemental. At the beginning of this action research in Cycle 1, I see my role as a supportive team member in the collaborative group, learning how to implement restorative practices.

The collaborative group for this project consists of the Wellbeing Co-ordinator, the Principal and myself. All completed a two day training session in August 2006 on Restorative Practice in Schools. The collaborative group can be defined as a task culture, as it is using specific skills and interests within the organisation, to produce a cultural change within the school. Handy (1984) believes that a task culture is a more economical way of implementing change "than a role culture," (p. 12) as it doesn't need every one to believe in the change before it is trialled.

It is important that I work with the current leadership / role structure as I have the authority to influence change in my own classroom practice and the current leadership has the authority to influence changes to the behaviour management procedure for the whole school. A behaviour management system needs to be implemented consistently across the school for it to be effective. "Restorative practices need to be systemic rather than ad hoc" (Principal. formal interview 25/8/2006)

The collaborative group is working together to learn the skills of implementing restorative practices and will disseminate information to the staff on restorative practice. The importance of the principal cannot be underestimated as Armstrong, Tobin & Thorsborne (2002) claim that with a principal involved in the training "there appears to be a more successful uptake of restorative practices across the whole school" (p.4).

The collaborative group aim to introduce restorative practices as another strategy to use for behaviour management. Introducing restorative practices will also benefit students that have been directly or indirectly affected by the conflict and often not catered for in our current behaviour management system. A critical element of the restorative approach is to involve victims, family and friends who have been affected by the offender's behaviour in the restorative process (Watchel,1999).

Meetings between the collaborative group members are limited due to teaching and/or administration demands. Communication happens readily in the informal setting of the staffroom where discussions on progress and projects are frequent. Email has provided a vital link between the collaborative group.

Reconnaissance Community

The Restorative Justice model used in the Australian justice system originated in New Zealand as a way of diverting young offenders away from the court system and was known as Family Group Conferencing. Since the 1990's it has been used in the New South Wales and South Australian juvenile justice system (Armstrong, Tobin & Thorsborne, 2002). Conferencing takes place in many parts of the world including the United States, Canada, South Africa, United Kingdom, Ireland and Singapore (Australian Institute of Criminology, no date). The growth in interest in Restorative Justice can be witnessed by the number of credible sites dedicated to Restorative Justice and Practices on the internet including examples of excellence in the Victorian Education Department's Sofweb Knowledge Bank.

This model for dealing with criminal behaviour has since been piloted in Australian schools as a way to deal with issues of student misbehaviour. Schools that are well functioning are seen as the ideal institution where children's social-emotional needs can be dealt with systemically. Schools are encouraged to be proactive and cater for students who are at risk of developing anti social behaviours. (Elias, Zins, Graczyk & Weissberg, 2003).

Into Schools

In 2002 the Victorian Department of Education and Training evaluated restorative practices and community conferences as a successful strategy in managing incidents of bullying (McGrath & Noble, 2006). "Restorative practices help students learn from their mistakes, reconcile and resolve problems with others," (p176). It was implemented as a strategy which uses questions that are designed to help the wrongdoer and victim heal a relationship that has been affected by conflict. At the same time, much research has shown that it is important to develop students' social and emotional skills in order to improve academic achievement. Behaviour management is more likely to be effective when the whole school proactively develops the social and emotional skills of its students as well as developing a behaviour management system that reflects and enhances these skills. This is reflected in the National Safe Schools Framework 2003 which advocates the whole community being involved in student wellbeing and co-operative learning (Jones, 2005).

Our school has adopted and piloted many proactive strategies and programs to enhance students' social and emotional learning such as Bounce Back, Positive Discipline, Massage in Schools, Kool Kids Positive Parents, Friends, Seasons and Buddy Grades.

In the last 2 years the whole school has been involved with professional development which has reinforced our commitment and understanding of the importance of developing the whole student; academically, socially and emotionally. This is also reflected in our recently audited school community values of success, respect and friendliness (School Charter, 2005-2007) which replaced a lengthy list of rules that students were expected to obey.

As the school has adopted a more proactive stance to increase students' social and emotional learning and connectedness to school, it became apparent to some in the school community that our current behaviour management system didn't necessarily reflect or use, the values and skills the school is trying to establish. A catalyst would be the negotiated transfer of a student who racially and physically abused a student from another school while on an inter school competition. For those directly involved, this didn't feel like a satisfactory solution even though it was an Education Department's sanctioned outcome, as all it did was punish the student. There was no offer of support for students and teachers who were affected.

Our current behaviour management can be described as a consistently implemented traditional system and which is based on retribution. This system appears to reflect a number of concerns identified in the literature as it:

- Fails to make a difference for some students (Murray, L. personal communication 12/4/2006)
- Is about punishment and not learning how misconduct has affected others (Morrison, 2005)
- Fails to effectively use emotional literacy skills that are being developed in classrooms that promote self understanding (Slee, 1988.)
- Is an inappropriate system for handling socially immature students as it may isolate them further from their peers (Pianta & Walsh, 1998)
- Fails to include parents in the process in a meaningful way
- Fails to give the victim, if there is one, a voice
- Fails to foster positive student teacher relationships through understanding (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001)

The discipline procedure is a function of the school system and schools are for learning. The culture of the discipline procedure needs to change to where conflict is seen as an opportunity to reflect a learning ethos.

Teachers need the skills to improve relationships with students that continue to misbehave, "handling misbehaviours in ways that do not detract from the quality of a relationship, and delivering intensive relationship improving experiences for targeted children" Pianta and Walsh, (1998, no page number). A discipline procedure that includes restorative practices may provide teachers with a new approach to enable

connectedness between teachers and students to be more effective. Connectedness with students matters in achievement of academic outcomes, developing a sense of self-worth and becoming a productive member of society (Murray, Mitchell, Gale, Edwards & Zyngier 2004).

Analysis of student behaviour data from the 2005 parent opinion survey, the 2006 staff opinion survey and the 2006 student connectedness to school survey shows that all parties believe that the current behaviour management system is effective however the data also reveals that there is room for improvement. It is with this background that staff at the school are reviewing its behaviour management practice.

My Classroom

Through professional learning at school and personal and professional growth while studying Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Student Welfare), I wrote informative articles on the importance of developing emotional and social intelligence for the school newsletter, a local magazine and applied and received funding to produce a DVD showcasing the variety of student welfare activities at our school. Lewin's theory of becoming "unfrozen" is highlighted here as I have come to appreciate the benefits in redefining the current behaviour management system, to further enhance connectedness, as necessary and achievable (Langdon & Marshall, 1998).

Since the beginning of the year, circle time, which develops a democratic and respectful forum for communicating, has been conducted on a weekly basis. During circle time we have shared our stories on different feelings to broaden the students' emotional vocabulary and we have discussed and solved problems from the "Who cares? We care" anonymous student communication box. The practice of circle time has enabled the introduction of restorative practices to be more readily accepted.

Communication between my students and myself has been further enhanced since the beginning of the year with the students writing to me in a confidential journal.

I have implemented Positive Discipline strategies where the punishment is more reflective of the misbehaviour and is not limited to time out or yard duty.

It is within this context that I have elected to implement and evaluate restorative practices in my classroom using the action research model. My purpose is to develop socially, competent individuals with the ability to develop a learning environment that is not distracted by social issues but enhanced by it and in doing so make my role as an educator easier.

Action Research

Action research "is something that teachers do in their classrooms all the time, often without realising it." (Action Research Support Kit, no date)

Action research is a cyclical model of questioning, planning, acting, observing and reflecting that helps the participants put theory into practice.

When action research is effectively practised, it enables the change agents to respond to the individual school culture and is therefore more likely to succeed in implementing genuine change.

This project is a conscious decision to use action research as a model for analysing a variety of data on our current discipline practice and making informed decisions towards developing a restorative practice.

Action Cycle One - Reflecting on my Classroom Practice.

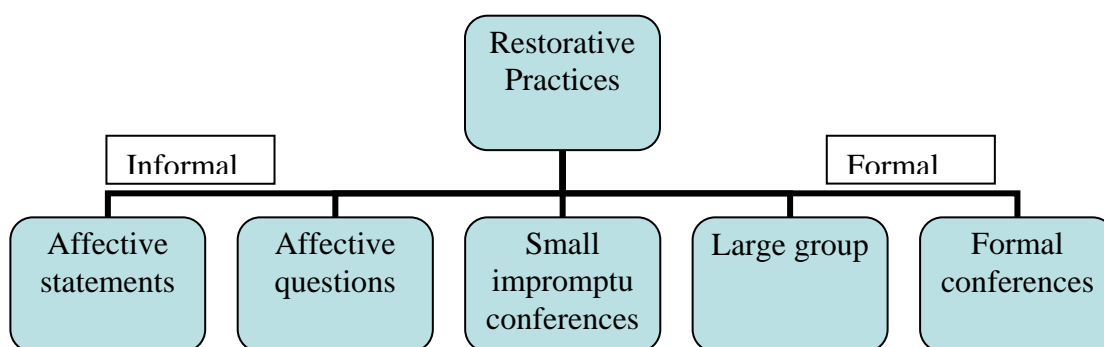
Goals

- To improve my confidence and understanding of implementing restorative practices in my teaching environment.
- To provide information to my students and parents to increase their understanding of restorative practice.

Plan

- Attend a two day conference, increasing my knowledge and skills in applying restorative practices in the classroom.
- Use incidents of student conflict and misbehaviour as a platform for implementing restorative practices at school.

The restorative practices continuum outlines interventions that are applicable



(Diagram 1) Adapted from Wachtel 1999

Indicators

- I will use restorative interventions in incidents of conflict and misconduct
- I will use the restorative practices question card
- Students show a willingness to participate in restorative conferences
- Students and parents show an awareness of restorative practice

The continuum shows the scope of restorative practices from informal to formal that can happen within a normal day at school. It is important to note that restorative practices are not confined to conferences.

The parents were informed of this project after the school leadership and School Council had given approval. A letter outlining the process and seeking permission for data collected from their child to be used in the written report was sent home. The letter created interest amongst students and parents. The students felt quite important and were very willing to participate in researching a better way of making sure everybody has their say when things go wrong at school.

There were many opportunities to use the restorative questions both in the classroom and in the playground. Most of the restorative interactions were discussions that did not require any written agreement. The problem arose when serious misconduct, that would normally require informing parents, was dealt with in a restorative manner. There was no format on the Register of Individual Student Conduct (RISC) to cater for this. Together, the collaborative group drafted a letter to inform the parents of the process involved, incorporating the philosophy of restorative justice and the restorative outcomes/obligations that all students involved have agreed to. To counteract any perceived backlash from parents over the consequences/outcomes agreed to, we modified the RISC form to include student signature.

After a discussion with the collaborative group it was decided that disseminating information to the parents in my grade would be minimal as it was felt that the staff need to be informed of restorative practice before involving parents.

However parents are informed about the implementation of restorative practice in my classroom through

- Direct involvement when their child has been sent home with a restorative practices letter, stating their child's obligations if they are the wrong doer
- Direct involvement if their child is the victim and a restorative practices letter has been sent home, stating what has been done to restore the relationship.
- Direct involvement of parents in circle time restorative conferences.
- Every student made a chatter box to take home and share which displayed the main points of circle time and restorative conferences
- Teacher / parent interactions on an informal basis.
- Anonymous parent survey reflecting the family perspective on what they now know about restorative practices.

Observation / Evaluation

Data used to evaluate the effectiveness of restorative practice intervention in student misconduct included anecdotal evidence, personal journal writing, student journals, tallies, continuum data and informal interviews with students and parents, individually and in small groups.

The first data collection from the students was to find out whether they felt there was a sense of fairness in their interactions with their peers and teacher when there were conflicts.

At the start of this cycle the students were involved in designing an anonymous continuum where they could place a cross which reflected how they felt during the week in answer to the question, "When things go wrong at school, do you feel you have the chance to have your say?" They chose the words at each end and also discussed as a group what it would mean if you placed your cross at various places on the continuum. The first continuum which was taken at the very beginning of the cycle showed that the majority of the students didn't feel like they have their say. This was also shown in analysis of the 'Who cares? We care' box, where the majority of the requests were for help when someone was being annoyed. These issues, I felt, could be handled by the students directly yet they felt they needed teacher intervention.

Parents were given the same continuum as their children with the aim of finding out if they have the same perception as their children. The data delivered back is of little value as less than half were returned. Of those that were returned (anonymously) the majority were positive however three responses indicated that their girls felt less positive about being able to have their say.

The data collected from the students' continuum over the weeks reflected a continuing positive shift in students' attitudes towards feeling that they do have their say however it also reflects that students' attitudes can change on a weekly basis. After the third continuum the results were shared and discussed with the students. These discussions also highlighted the fact that the students felt that they lack communication skills in both giving and receiving messages of concern.

This observation influenced classroom practice to use The Bounce Back program in explicitly teaching students' conflict resolution skills.

Data collection also involved drawing. The students were asked to draw and share two pictures which reflected solving problems together using restorative questions and having time out or yard duty. I observed that the students can clearly identify the differences and the language articulated shows a preference for a restorative practice.

Ongoing teacher observation of the effects of restorative practices with a group of three girls where there are friendship issues that threatened to make every one of the girls unhappy, showed promising outcomes. Using conflict resolution skills and a series of restorative questions in small conferences they came to an understanding of how each of them felt and found solutions. "... it was so easy..." (Student A journal entry 29/8/06). I have observed that they have continued to be more mindful of situations that could cause conflicts and are proactive in their actions to avoid complications (Journal entry 31/8/06).

Individual student data collection also provided an overall picture of how all students felt about restorative practices and yard duty or time out. The students were asked to fill in three columns (a) restorative practices, (b) time out/ yard duty, and (c) interesting things you want to say, using words or phrases to describe their feelings.

The majority of positive responses were for restorative practices while the overwhelming response for time out and yard duty was negative. It is interesting to note that there was a strong negative response to being embarrassed during time out and yard duty. A behaviour management system which relies on shame to change student behaviour can work for some but it threatens to isolate students who already have negative perceptions of themselves and feel rejected by the community which may result in anger. Restorative practices allows for the shame to be discharged when students take responsibility for their inappropriate behaviour (Morrison, 2003). Care needs to be taken in interpreting this data as it may be tainted by the students reflecting my attitude.

A limited number of parents have been directly involved in restorative practices that have involved circle time and/or children having obligations to meet. Informal interactions with these parents show that all are happy with the process and as one parent noted "...I feel honoured to be invited into the circle..." (Journal entry 02/0906).

Analysis of the 14 anonymous family surveys, edited by two peers and two classroom students before distribution, showed that the majority of parents and students believe that problems in the classroom are being effectively dealt with. The term "restorative practice" was deliberately left out as it was felt it would alienate parents. The comments given emphasize the importance of communication and involving all who will be affected in the process to ensure differing view points are discussed.

I missed the opportunity in this survey to ask parents of the students who have been involved in a formal restorative intervention to comment on the process.

Reflection

The continuum (diagram 1) shows that restorative practice is not limited to being implemented in serious incidents of misbehaviour or conflict.

In the classroom, I found that affective statements and questions are the easiest to miss in everyday interactions with students. They are the reactive comments that I make automatically that were the hardest to stop. I felt like a learner and I realise that if I found it difficult to think and act restoratively at times, so will the students.

On yard duty and time out duty, the main function of the teacher is to monitor the safety and wellbeing of the students. When my main role is welfare I found it easy to engage in restorative practice as my time was not competing with achieving academic outcomes. This highlights that fact that this is a new process and implementing new practices requires effort and a belief that the changes are worth implementing.

This is a self change for myself and in Egan's (2001), The Skilled Helper model, I am in the process of working out the benefits of this change, Step 11 C. Dealing with younger students on yard duty presented new challenges for myself as I discovered their needs and comprehension of restorative practices needs to be age appropriate.

There were frustrating incidents where I felt using a restorative practice was insufficient and I needed to take control. The rights of the individual at the time were forfeited when their behaviour threatened to impact negatively on others. This need to control can be abused and contradictory to restorative practices. To counteract this, a restorative intervention opportunity needs to be initiated after the incident.

Restorative practice changes the teacher's role in conflicts from judge to facilitator. It becomes a democratic process when all parties involved are willing to make amends and take responsibility for their actions. This gives the students a say they may not have had before. It also requires them to negotiate outcomes and obligations which may be skills they may not have and further highlights the need to teach conflict resolution skills. As a teacher I need to help them develop different methods of conflict resolution and at the same time honour the decisions they make.

The use of restorative practices can take more time to implement in a conference setting than the traditional method where the teacher decides on the punishment from an established set of consequences. In restorative practice, all those involved are responsible for decision making and the decision is not predictable. This new method of handling conflict, which can take considerable time and effort to organise, needs to have ongoing reinforcement that it does make a difference in changing students' behaviour and attitude. There has to be measurable benefits for the teacher as well as the student if there is to be ongoing commitment. The challenge will be involving the staff in establishing an agreed set of measures that shows a shift in student behaviour is due to restorative practices.

Despite parents' knowledge of restorative practice being limited to more informal, anecdotal knowledge acquisition, they will be a resource to utilise when the school community is invited to review the student behaviour management system.

The conference provided commitments that had to be met by all participants. The commitment to practice a No Blame Conference provided the opportunity for discussion and reflection within the collaborative group. These discussions took place in the staffroom which had the added benefit of allowing other staff members to hear and discuss our progress and make them feel part of the process. The collaborative group played an important collegiate role in modelling problem solving when things went wrong and as a group with which to celebrate success.

Restorative interventions often involved students from other classrooms. Many classroom teachers, especially those working closely with the Wellbeing co-ordinator and myself, were commenting on the positive results of our interactions with students and have sought us out to provide them with information on using restorative practice as noted (Journal entry.19/7/2006) "I've seen you talking to the children doing time out and you really need to share what you are doing with the staff." (Journal entry 1/8/2006) Another teacher wanted a quick run down of how to deal with a playground incident. Egan, The Skilled Helper (2002) describes this as strategy sampling. This teacher was prepared to trial restorative practice. She reported back that it was a most satisfying experience as she watched the students "...sorting it out and listening to each other."

I have learnt that achievement and refinement of restorative intervention skills is a new way of thinking for teachers and students and requires practice and reflection. It is remembering to see the opportunities to use simple affective statements in the daily interactions with students. I often miss the opportunity to use affective statements when my priority is the academic task. It will take time to develop a restorative way of being that becomes an integral part of my teaching practice.

With this in mind, my next cycle will continue to include skill acquisition of restorative practices while adding the dissemination of knowledge and benefits in implementing restorative practices to the staff at our school. My purpose for doing this is so that staff have an understanding of restorative practice before the curriculum day in February 2007 and bring to the fore any concerns they may have, making it a more effective day.

Action Cycle Two- Engaging Others.

Goals

- Increase the teachers' awareness of inadequacies in our current behaviour management system.
- Increase the teachers' understanding and use of restorative practices as an effective strategy in student behaviour management.
- To continue to acquire restorative practices skill and conflict resolution skills for myself and my students.

Plan

- After attending a two day conference on implementing restorative practices and professional reading of related texts, provide opportunities for teacher engagement in discussions and practise of restorative practice.

The strategies to achieve these goals involve modelling of restorative practice in my classroom and supervision duty; changing the structure of staff meetings to include circle time, sharing of professional development learning, analysing of existing data and introducing the students' perspective on behaviour management, all of which will provide opportunities for professional debate and reflection.

The aim, through developing a shared understanding and need, is to encourage a change in the structural arrangements to support the introduction of restorative practice as well as attempt to define our cultural beliefs as teachers and what we believe the practice of behaviour management should "look like." Peters, Dobbins & Johnson (1996) believes structural change is more likely to be effective if it is accompanied by a redefining of the culture.

Indicators

- Increased use of restorative practice when dealing with behaviour management by teachers.
- Increase in restorative practices intervention data recorded in the Monday Staff Bulletin.
- Teachers seeking information from the collaborative group on using restorative questions when dealing with student behaviour.

Circle time is a new concept for many teachers and as it is an integral part of restorative practices. The collaborative group instigated a change in the structure of staff meetings to begin with circle time as a legitimate model for ensuring inclusiveness. Staff meetings begin with circle time activities, not only as a way of showing the resources available and the variety of activities that can be used, but as a workable model for solving and discussing issues for both staff and students.

The staff were asked to complete a simple anonymous survey (trialled by two classroom teachers first) which aimed to find out if they shared the concerns about our behaviour management system as the collaborative group. The survey results were published in the Monday staff bulletin with out any conclusion in order to promote discussion.

After the survey, information on restorative practice was delivered at a staff meeting through a Powerpoint presentation. The presentation included an analysis of the data collected from RISC which showed 37 different students have multiple entries of 4 or more since the beginning of this year, receiving time out and yard duty for a range of unacceptable behaviours. These 37 students account for 77 time outs since the beginning of the year

A copy of the restorative questions was placed into the yard duty bags for use by teachers.

Observation/ Evaluation

Data used to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used to disseminate information on using restorative practices include anecdotal evidence, personal journal writing and informal interviews with colleagues and analysis of RISC data.

Circle time at the beginning of staff meetings had a mixed response. Many teachers used body language or verbalised their discomfort with the activities. I also noted in my journal a teacher's comment (30/7/2006) "I've been teaching since 1974 and this is the first time I've ever been a part of this, thank you."

In this short time, circle time has provided laughter, anxiety, tears and support. The level of discomfort for some has not dissipated and for some is becoming more accepted. "At first I was dreading doing this [circle time] but as it came around to my turn I was quite happy" (Journal entry 4/9/2006).

To date only one teacher has taken up the offer to observe and participate in circle time / restorative practice in my room. The implications of circle time making some teachers feel uncomfortable mean that implementing restorative practices, which relies on a process of honesty, respect and openness that is displayed in circle time, will take time. It would be interesting to use circle time format to discuss the use of circle time and how staff feel about it.

The staff survey in its application created interest as it involved all staff and not just teaching staff. It proved to be effective in highlighting that there are many who have "responsibility for managing student behaviour [and it] is not the sole turf of classroom teachers or administrators" (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001, p. 9).

The survey results show that the current practice is perceived by staff as being well understood by students and is effective the majority of the time. The survey shows that there is a level of contentment with the current system but at the same time there are many teachers who employ different discipline methods other than time out and yard duty. The survey showed that the majority of staff are willing to learn about restorative practices. However the staff survey does not show an overwhelming response that there is a need to change and until the need to change is stronger than the need to resist change, then the staff will stay frozen in the current system (Marcus, 2000).

The Powerpoint presentation was a combined effort with the wellbeing co-ordinator and myself presenting. The purpose was to provide information on restorative practice as well as present facts pertinent to our behaviour management which show the system as being ineffective for some students. I observed silence when these facts were presented. A role culture can be a disadvantage in implementing restorative practices as other teachers may see it as the responsibility [role] of the teacher who has the disruptive student in their grade and not a shared responsibility.

Reflection

The theory is fine when things are going well. Implementing changes to our behaviour management system will challenge the way we operate as professionals. Difficulty arises when there are clashes between teachers and students. Teachers are not used to sharing discipline problems other than sending a student for disciplining by the principal. There is a sense of professional pride when you are perceived as having good control of your students. The need to change the way some teachers interact with students was highlighted when an experienced teacher confided that "I've never apologised to a student before" and "six months ago I would've given a time out and not thought anything about it" (Journal entry 5/9/2006).

Restorative practice requires a more democratic practice and assumes that both parties wish to restore relationships. Teachers need to be willing to question their concept of control in order to achieve this. This

came to the fore when behaviour problems arose during the grade 6 play. The pressing need to maintain control and continue with the play caused a clash of philosophy for the Wellbeing Co-ordinator as she exclaimed "so much for restorative justice!" (Journal entry 14/9/2006) and the traditional approach to discipline was used, as at the time it was perceived as being efficient and effective in restoring control.

This cycle is incomplete at the time of writing this paper. This cycle highlights the fact that restorative practice is a way of being and for change to happen then individuals first need to question the way they do things before they can see a need to change. "Change is accomplished by individuals first. Institutions cannot change until the individuals within them change" (Marsh, 2000 p390). Schools can, however, implement systemic structures that can support and encourage change.

I have learnt that it will take considerable time to develop a "shared vision for the adoption of a restorative justice approach" (Morrison 2001, no page numbers) for our behaviour management system. The process of changing our system of behaviour management will eventually require us to look within ourselves and decide if we want to change.

Future directions

Since school has returned in term 4, the momentum to implement restorative practices has diminished as other priorities have come to the fore. The following proposals may be adopted in order to put restorative practices back on the agenda.

- Widen the collaborative group to include all the teachers of the 37 students identified, as continuing to be at risk of developing anti social behaviours, by the current behaviour management system. Together, this group can decide on the data to collect, form small groups for reflection and support and present their findings to all the staff. The purpose will be to widen the ownership of the change so that it becomes larger than an individual's research project.
- Student perspective may be delivered through a video to be shown at a staff meeting where the students in my grade interviewed each other about What happens when you get into trouble? The good and bad points.
- On the Monday staff bulletins in Term 4, short statements or articles about restorative practices/circle time could be published providing opportunities for informal discussion and reflection.

Conclusion

Using the action research model to manage the change process ensures that the direction we take reflects the needs of our school. The change process is as complex and individual as the community within our school. Action research has proved useful in providing non-emotive data to highlight the short comings of our current system. The challenge will be embedding action research as an overt practice used by the school community to evaluate the implementation of restorative practices.

Morrison (2001) notes that even though our "thinking about managing behaviour can change, this often does not lead to systemic changes in practice" (no page number). Being able to record a restorative practice on the R.I.S.C. register, is a small systemic step that we have taken in order to change the way we deal with managing behaviour.

The disruptive student remains a challenge. Restorative practices have made the student feel more involved in the process of managing and reflecting on his own behaviour.

I am optimistic that the glimpses of progress shown by this student in managing his behaviour will continue and I am encouraged that restorative practice has made an impact in helping other students resolve conflicts themselves.

My commitment to continue implementing restorative practices will be tested daily as I endeavour to incorporate restorative practices into my teaching style until it becomes the norm, a practice that happens without having to think about it.

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