

Introducing Restorative Practices – Transcript

Video available at <http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/swap/wellbeing/teachers/environment/>

Tony Levett (St Dominic's School, Camberwell)

In 2005 we looked at our School Improvement Plan and we identified that in student wellbeing we needed to have an audit and look at our policies and practices. And we wanted to look at what was best practice happening out in schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. We'd heard about this wonderful program Restorative Practices and we felt that it would be something that we could look at. So we conducted a survey with our parents and our students regarding student wellbeing. We then also went down the track of getting advice from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne on best practice. We also had issues of conflict management in the school that we wanted to address and we felt that something like restorative practices would be a great thing for us and that's where the motivation came from that we needed to look at the great things that were happening in the school but ways to enhance that and we felt that restorative practices could lay the foundation for us and enabled us to then put an action plan in place for our School Improvement Plan and we're undertaking that at the moment.

Introducing the concept to staff was the next important aspect for us. With our student wellbeing and National Safe Schools Framework team we implemented an action plan and that involved initially a day that we had together; a professional learning activity day where we had an audit of our student wellbeing practices. We looked at the survey data that we obtained from our parents and students and also looked at models out there, one of them being the Health Promoting Schools model and also restorative practices. The day was a fantastic day with lots of great input from staff and you could sense from there that with restorative practice there were lots of things we're doing in the school already but we could go down a bit further, we'd like to know a little bit more. From the day one of our actions was to send members from the Student Wellbeing team to a professional learning activity conducted by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and that was fantastic. We came away from those two days saying "this is what we need as a foundation for our code of behaviour and our practices in student wellbeing here at St Dominic's." And then we were fortunate to be involved in one of the schools that were able to be involved this year. We've had wonderful input with the day that you presented for us and the team meetings that we've had also building on that, our circle day, our circle team meeting was fantastic and we're now at a stage where the staff are looking forward to fully implementing the practices next year with our parents and we're at that stage with our code of behaviour; that restorative practices is the foundation of that code of behaviour for us.

Sue Thompson (Siena College, Camberwell)

We formed a committee and we thought long and hard about what would be the best way to go about introducing restorative practices. Not as introducing something new, because when we looked at it and did a lot more work on what is restorative practices we realized that the whole idea about restorative practices fits very much into our philosophy as a school and that a number of the student management strategies we already have are very like restorative practices. So we looked at restorative practices enhancing what we do and we thought we would take that line too because we find... and I think one of the great challenges in schools with busy teachers is that you introduce something and teachers think "oh, another new thing we have to do" so we were very careful to stress that we would be using it to further inform what we do and enhance what we do rather than introduce something entirely new.

During the past 12 months all the eight house coordinators have gone through full training for restorative practices with the Catholic Education Office up to even the mediation sessions and the family conferences. So we've had an opportunity to use restorative practices and the language of restorative practices with our students across the board, so as house coordinators we've adopted the whole-school approach to restorative practices. And I suppose that's been easy because in a sense all the house coordinators are people who are on-board; no-one had to be convinced that it was a good idea. Everybody went to the professional

development days with the idea that this was going to be a good thing to do. So we've started out doing it in an easy way. The real challenge is now to introduce it to the whole staff and introducing it in the most effective way.

Sue Cahill (St Charles Borromeo, Templestowe)

The difference it's made here at St Charles to the whole staff and students is being far more respectful in the way that people speak to each other all the time and that probably intertwines with our values work as well. It's also been a huge change for students through their peer mediation program; they now use the restorative questions that the staff use when they are working with other students in their problem solving of little issues that happen in the playground and classroom, and we did that so we had a commonality between staff and students so that everybody was getting used to hearing the same questions and working on the same framework.

Something that is consistent across the whole staff. It is owned by the whole staff. But I have to say that with the preps we have adapted the questions slightly to have them more meaningful and probably more succinct for their understandings when they first come into school. But it's bringing it to the table with them and so they get used to the language and get used to the process. I think that's been really important for them, so it's a stepping-stone before they get into the middle school area.

Parents are always invited to come and talk about behaviour management. It's something that we support very strongly here at St Charles and it has been seen very warmly and acceptingly by the parents; that this is a gentle method of restoring justice and restoring wellbeing is very much part of what our wellbeing approach is here at St Charles.