

SWAP : Student Wellbeing Action Partnership

Investigating the implementation of restorative justice practices through circle time

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 – Catholic

Type – Secondary / girls

Setting –Metropolitan

Size – 501-750 students

Abstract

This project was undertaken at a Catholic single sex school. The school has a strong emphasis on student wellbeing and is continually looking at ways to improve the various programs offered and strategies employed at the whole school through a preventative approach to student management. Using restorative justice as opposed to retributive justice has grown significantly in schools recently. The values that underpin restorative justice complement very well the underlying values of our school. The choice to focus on circle time was based on a personal interest fostered by research and something that was achievable within the context of the project. In my current leadership position I am also responsible for reviewing, developing and implementing student wellbeing policies so I found myself in the ideal position to develop and deliver a worthwhile project.

A Core Team was established of interested staff from the Middle and Senior Schools. After developing knowledge and understanding of the values underpinning restorative justice, professional development was undertaken in the running of circle time. Through regular meetings a program was developed to trial circle time in both sub schools. We evaluated our success as circle time facilitators and, through various types of surveys, the reactions of the students.

The Core Team now feel competent not only to continue running circle time sessions in classes, but are also planning to train other key staff and extend the use of circle time through our Pastoral Program next year. The reactions of the students were overall very positive towards the structure and process of circle time and they enjoyed the opportunities to engage in a structured discussion where everyone's opinion was valued. As a result of the pilot project a number of key personnel and committees have become aware of restorative justice and the Core Team now has the support of the administration to develop restorative justice practices with more key staff next year and eventually to develop a whole school approach.

The original goals have been achieved and the fact that approval has been given to continue to develop restorative justice eventually at a whole school level means that the project has long term benefits. The other benefit of the project is becoming aware of and skilled in the process of action research and aware of how it can be used in the future to bring about meaningful change in an educational setting.

Introduction

In 2003 I was appointed at my school to a newly created position of Senior House Coordinator, which meant I was responsible for the welfare of approximately one hundred Years 10, 11 and 12 students belonging to one of the four Houses in our school. Even though I have always been involved in the welfare of students by being a Home Room/ House Group teacher, my primary focus had been in curriculum. My major concern now became student welfare and I became much more aware of strategies and practices that could be employed to promote student wellbeing. At the same time restorative justice was also being promoted by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and they were offering various types of assistance to schools who wished to explore the use of restorative justice in their schools. Discussions with other House Coordinators lead to me to become very interested in the notion of restorative justice and a review of school policy documents undertaken for my essay during the PGDES(SW) course indicated, at least in theory, that restorative justice would be very appropriate for our school.

This year I was appointed as Head of Middle School. This gave me responsibility for the welfare of all students in Years 7, 8, and 9 and furthermore provided me with the opportunity to develop strategies and actually put theory into practice. The more I became involved with initiatives such as MindMatters, National Safe Schools Framework, Health Promoting Schools Model, Victorian Government Framework (to name just a few) I became more convinced that restorative justice would enhance all of these initiatives. Initially I was interested in using restorative justice as it had been in the criminal justice system to restore relationships that had been damaged by anti-social behaviour. It was when I attended the National Coalition Against Bullying Conference in October 2005 that I became aware of the use of circle time as one of the initiatives that can be employed at the preventative stage of student wellbeing and its relevance to restorative justice.

One of the most useful exercises at this stage was the undertaking of extensive reading for my essay on Organisational Change as part of the PGDES(SW) subject Organisational Change in Student Welfare. My investigation of restorative justice made me more convinced of how useful it would be in the school context. The other important aspect of my research was investigating the role of a change agent. My experience at the school and the way in which change has been handled (or mishandled) confirmed my idea that if I my project was to move beyond an interesting pilot I was going to have to be very strategic and that I must work within the past and present culture of school. Stoll (1999) develops this in the following way:

“Any attempt to improve a school that neglects school culture is ‘doomed to tinkering’ (Fullan, 1988) because school culture influences readiness for change. Indeed, it can be either a black hole or a fertile garden for improvement (Stoll, 1999). Schein (1985) considers school culture’s essence to be the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs shared by an organisation’s members. These operate unconsciously, and define the organisation’s view of itself and its environment. This means that each school has a reality of school life and how it goes about its work. School culture is complex because it is largely implicit and we only see surface aspects, for example people who work in isolation, or in balkanised groups (Heargreaves, 1994), or in collaboration” (Stoll, 1999, p. 511)

I therefore enlisted the assistance of two other well-respected House Coordinators, one each from the Senior and Middle Schools, to work with me.

Context

The school is a Year 7-12 Catholic girls’ school operated by a religious order. Some of our students come from the local area, but many come from outlying suburbs where large homes with large mortgages are the norm. Although the number may vary from year to year, we have at least 50–60 feeder schools. The school is divided into 2 sub schools, Middle School (7-9) and Senior School (10-12). For Pastoral and administrative purposes students are assigned to a House Group which is vertically structured. In the Senior School a House Group would contain students from Years 10–12 and in the Middle School students from Years 7–9. The change from a horizontal to a vertical structure was made three years ago to strengthen the House system and use it as a way of better connecting students to the school. One of the underlying principles discussed in

the MindMatters literature relates to the importance of students feeling connected and the significant roles that school can play.

"Schools can greatly influence, either negatively or positively, opportunities for developing relatedness. A young person may have the ability to connect, but have few or limited options at school or in class to participate with others...A sense of belonging, attachment or connectedness to the school, or a relationship with a supportive and caring teacher, has been shown to enhance resilience and be protective of the mental health of students." (*School Matters*, 2000 p.10 & 11)

Initial Aims

Ultimately I would like to have restorative justice principles underpin all our relationships in our school community and for restorative justice practices be used at all levels of student welfare. To achieve this I first wanted to develop a pilot project that would allow key personnel in the school to become familiar with restorative justice theory and practice, and then pilot a program which would demonstrate how restorative justice could work.

Long Term Goals:

- a. To enhance staff knowledge, understanding and practice in the area of student wellbeing
 - b. To introduce restorative justice practices to all facets of student wellbeing
- Having these aims in mind, my research had made me aware that restorative justice practices could be used at all aspects of the students well being education. I eventually decide on circle time because of my own personal interest and also because a training day is available at the right time. So I therefore developed the following short term goals.

Cycle One:

To establish, develop and train a core team in the use of circle time

Cycle Two:

To pilot a circle time program with selected classes

Author's Role

Analysing our school as an organisation based on Handy's study, (1984) we, like most organisations at one time or another, would fit all four cultures, although as Handy indicates (p.15) like most secondary schools we belong predominantly to the role culture. My clearly defined role as the Head of Middle School is to "work collaboratively with the Deputy Principal - Student Welfare and members of the Pastoral Care Core Team for the welfare of the staff and student body incorporating development and implementation of pastoral care, student management and welfare policies and programs for staff, students and parents... ensuring that the College Whole School Approach to Pastoral Care and Student Management Policy is justly and fairly implemented, and that it is regularly reviewed." (*Staff Handbook*)

Collaborative Group

Having enlisted the support of the crucial personnel in the school I sought to establish a collaborative group, who would also act as the Core Team, to work with me on the project. I have discussed this in greater detail in Action Cycle One.

Reconnaissance

As discussed in my essay submitted for Organisational Change and Student Welfare, Catholic culture and the culture of the religious order lends itself to the development of health promoting initiatives. Given my school's culture and current practices, it seemed an opportune time to introduce restorative justice practices as a logical development of our current student wellbeing policies and practices. As a Catholic school steeped in the traditions of a religious order with a strong emphasis on Social Justice, there is much in the school's overt culture, (Jones and May, 1992, pp. 231-2) that reflects an approach to all relationships within the school that is

based on the notions of fairness and forgiveness. All our public school documents, from the Mission Statement through to our Pastoral Care and Healthy Relationships policies, are littered with statements that emphasise that the school is a caring community supportive of students, parents and staff. "We strive to create a community where we can all feel special, loved, heard and respected, in which we are encouraged to live justly and with compassion for others." (*School Mission Statement, 2000*)

"Pastoral care at [the school] is a force for healing, reconciliation and liberation [and] is an expression of, and commitment to justice; ensures student management procedures are based on forgiveness and justice – allowing one to make a mistake, to accept responsibility for one's actions and to learn from this. [It further] ensures the curriculum is both inclusive and comprehensive and is inextricably linked to pastoral care." (*School College Pastoral Care Policy, 2004*)

The Healthy Relationships Policy establishes guidelines for dealing with bullying in a manner that exemplifies a "spirit of justice and compassion" (*School Healthy Relationships Policy, 1998*).

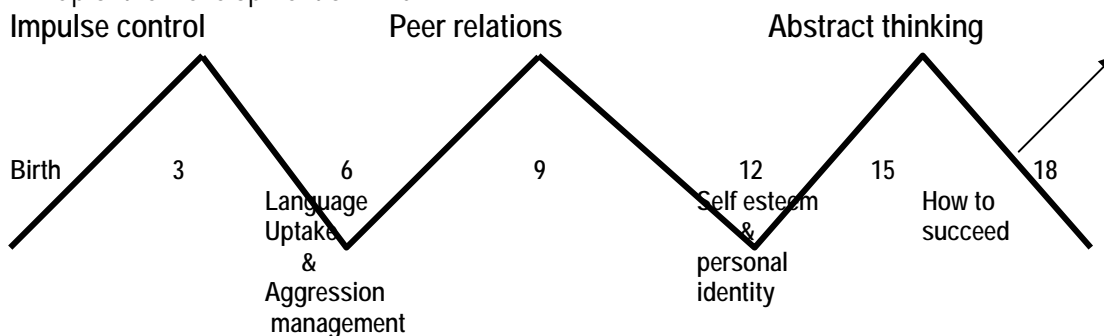
Explicit in all our formal documents is the notion that teaching and learning and student well being are inextricably linked and that a whole school approach is the most desirable way to achieve the best outcomes for all students. "Everyone in the school community is involved in pastoral care whether is be in the classroom, or on bus duty, at the front desk or in casual conversation in the school ground." (*School Pastoral Care Policy, 2004*)

How then could the introduction of restorative practices help the school? I believe it would give us the best chance of matching practice with policy, and draw together all student wellbeing initiatives into a coordinated program under the restorative practices umbrella, hopefully demonstrating to staff that this is not just another project, but a logical extension of all the other programs that we have underway.

My decision to focus on the preventative stage of restorative justice and specifically circle time grew out of my experiences this year with our Year 7 cohort. All year the Middle School House Coordinators and myself have dealt with a large number of relationship issues with the students to the extent that it was obvious that we really needed to do something at a whole year level. Towards the end of Term 2 this year, the Middle School coordinators were also involved in a phone survey of all Year 7 parents, engaging them in conversation about their daughter's progress and how she had settled in socially to school. From the 20 parents canvassed by two coordinators, 7 parents made us aware of issues of unhappiness caused by relationship problems in the year level. As a group we felt this as too high and suggested that we need to address the issues related to developing and maintaining positive relationships with student peers. Our school takes Year 7 students from over 50 feeder schools, so we have a significant number of students who come to the school on their own or with only one or two students from their primary school. We also have a significant shift in relationships with students who come from the same school. We have found Andrew Fuller's research into the adolescent brain very useful. In *Don't Waste Your Breath – An Introduction to the Mysterious World of the Adolescent Brain*, (Fuller, publication date unavailable), he makes two points that are very relevant to our work with Year 7. Firstly that:

During an average week, adolescents have been reported to spend close to one third of their time awake talking with peers but only 8% talking with adults (Csikszentimihalyi, Larson and Prescott, 1977) (p.11) and secondly that self esteem and personal identity are crucial issues around age 12. (Fuller, p.4)

A Map of the Development of Mind



Based on the evidence that we had collected from Year 7 parents, and our research, I realized that we did not have any real quantitative data from our Year 7 group. I was hopeful that the Deputy Principal Student Welfare would agree to us participating in the ACER Social and Emotional Wellbeing survey.

“Sample social-emotional well-being characteristics surveyed include student self-perception and teacher perceptions of the extent to which students: are happy, feel safe, lose their temper, get along with family members, could do better in schoolwork, feel liked by classmates, worry a lot, get into trouble, feel bad for long periods of time, are mean to people, like the kind of person they are.” (ACER website, 2006)

Unfortunately funds were not available and so we have to rely on the data we already had plus our own anecdotal evidence based on the students who were presenting to us with friendship problems.

Last year the Year 7 students had been involved in a ‘Friendship Afternoon’ which the Middle School Coordinators characterised as the students having lots of fun but not really addressing the more challenging relationship issues. After attending a circle time in-service I then became absolutely convinced of the way in which this strategy could be used with the different Year 7 groups to really address some worrying trends. Sue Roffey (2006) argues: “Circle Time ... is a structured framework for group interaction, one that enables students to think reflectively and creatively, talk together about important issues, grow to have understanding about themselves and others, and over time to develop knowledge and skills they can put into practice.”

I therefore decided to pilot the use of Circle Time with two other coordinators, so that we could cover each of the five Year 7 groups, in Terms 3 and 4 in 2006.

Action Cycles

As action research is a self reflective enquiry (Carr & Kemmis 1986) undertaken specifically to bring about change, enthusiastic proponents of action research including Kemmis and McTaggart stress the essentially cyclical nature of action research which includes planning, acting, observing and evaluating. (Kemmis & McTaggart , 1982)

Action cycle one

Goal: 1. To establish, develop and train a core team in the use of circle time.

- Approach relevant staff members to join core team
- Gauge their level of commitment and interest
- Train core team members through professional reading and participation in workshops

Indicators:

- Core team will have knowledge of how to use circle time
- Core team will be keen to implement circle time with appropriate student groups within the school

Having become convinced myself of the usefulness of circle time and enthused about developing a pilot program I sought the support of appropriate staff members to join the project. I wanted people who were not only broadly committed to the concept of the use of restorative justice, but also staff members who were

strategically placed through their positions in the school hierarchy to influence other staff members. I approached a Senior School and Middle School House Coordinator. Both these people I have worked with closely, I know them as competent operators and they are strategically placed to influence positively all those responsible for students well being in the school. Previous conversations with these two people had also lead me to believe that they were very interested in all aspects in the use of restorative justice in a school environment. I was further buoyed by the fact that at our initial meeting they agreed to commit to a regular fortnightly meeting schedule, undertake professional reading and professional development. Although I had already gained approval for the project from the College Principal and Vice Principal, I extended an invitation to all our meetings to the Vice Principal - Student Welfare so that she would be fully aware of what our program was and how we were trying to achieve our goals.

My biggest stumbling block at this stage was being able to tap into any workshops on how to conduct circle time. The professional reading that I had completed was of a theoretical nature rather than being instructive. Very fortuitously a fellow PGDES(SW) participant made me aware of a circle time workshop being conducted by Inyahead Press. All Core Team members were able to attend.

Observation/Evaluation

The workshop was conducted as a circle time session and we all felt skilled, enthused and absolutely clear on how we should proceed at this stage. At our next Core Team meeting the following observations were made: *"It [the workshop] was most enjoyable, the process now makes sense. A number of the strategies are similar to what I use in my drama classes."* (Core Team member)

"I found the workshop inspiring. It gave us excellent strategies for how to get kids involved. We were able to practice the skills immediately, and I felt that even only after half a day I knew the other participants well. I can see how the strategies would be excellent to use in our House Groups at the beginning of the year so that the students can get to know one another." (Core Team member)

"It made very good sense. I now feel as though we have a real sense of direction as to where we can go with this project". (Core Team member)

Another issue discussed at this meeting was the problem of inappropriate disclosure. Are we (the Core Team members) equipped to deal with these in a student group? It was because of this issues that we had invited to our first meeting after the workshop, the School Counsellor and the Pastoral Care Worker. They agreed at this meeting to become part of our Core Team, to attend our meetings and also to sit in on some of our Circle Time sessions with students in case there were issues of inappropriate disclosure.

The other very positive outcome from our workshop was the purchase of a number of excellent instructional books on how to conduct Circle Time. Step by step instructions which we could use based on our own experiences at the workshop. The most useful was Sue Roffey's *Circle Time for Emotional Literacy* (2006). It contains several introductory chapters on the why circle time is an excellent strategy to use with students, and then the step by step guide to conducting sessions in class. Further chapters are devoted to useful themes for circle time sessions including self-awareness and self esteem, emotional knowledge, understanding and managing feelings. There is also clear indication of the age suitability of all the suggested activities so that the book can be used by primary and secondary teachers.

Reflection

At the completion of this action cycle I felt much more in control of the project and absolutely clear on how to proceed. The enthusiasm of the rest of the core team was further encouragement, and the School Counsellor and Pastoral Care Worker were very enthusiastic in their support. We were all looking forward to continuing cycle two.

Action Cycle Two

Goal : To pilot a circle time program with selected classes

Indicators:

- Core team will conduct circle time sessions
- Core team will evaluate process with students and share observations and reflections in meetings
- Core team will suggest ways on which circle time can be developed even further in the school

Although we as the Core Team members had some ideas about the issues we might raise during circle time sessions, the direction we should take was made very clear from the information we were receiving from parents and students about friendship issues in Year 7. It was with this issue in mind that we planned carefully at our next meeting our first circle time sessions. We used Sue Roffey's *Circle Time for Emotional Literacy* (2006) as our guide and developed a step by step guide that we could all use in our first sessions. Being mere novices in the use of circle time, we felt it was essential that we had a very detailed and comprehensive guide to follow. The School Counsellor and Pastoral Care Worker agreed to attend our session to help us and also become familiar themselves with the process.

Finding the time to fit circle time into the very crowded secondary school day was not initially a problem. Two of the Core Team members taught two different Year 7 classes. We started off this cycle with aim of conducting circle time sessions with all Year 7 classes throughout October.

The theme of our first sessions was to be friendship. A show of hands in our classes revealed that only one or two students in each group had any experience with circle time so we decided they needed to be introduced to the process gently so they didn't have to expose themselves to dealing with difficult issues straight away. Once we had gauged their reactions to the process and felt more confident ourselves we then, in the subsequent sessions, would tackle more challenging issues such as using 'put downs' and 'spreading rumours'. These were the behaviours that we were observing in our classrooms, or that students were reporting to us on a regular basis.

Observation

a. Place and space

Following the advice of various practitioners like Roffey (2006) about the importance of place and space I chose the school hall as the venue. It was away from the prying eyes of other students, it provided me with a venue that gave me space to place 25 chairs comfortably, further space for us to do group activities and sufficient space for students to find a quiet corner to reflect alone. It also meant that I could set up the area without having to move the usual furniture usually found in a classroom. I thought it had worked quite well, and in a follow up meeting advised the other Core Team members to book the hall. The School Counsellor, a more objective observer, commented that she felt the hall was too big and that the session lost some of its necessary closeness. We all then agreed to conduct subsequent sessions in our classrooms, building into the timeline of the session time to move furniture. More active group work can be done outside or in other large spaces that exist in the school.

b. Numbers:

Most of our classes, certainly in Years 7 to 10, are around the 22 – 25 student. We have observed that because of this we need to be careful that all our activities can move quickly through the group so that students, particularly Year 7 students, do not lose focus as we move around the group. We also found as we get more expert ourselves that the activities that involve the whole group are going more smoothly and quickly.

c. Rules:

All students have responded well to the four rules that we have identified and revisit at the beginning of each circle time session. It is only with one group that the teacher has had to remind three students that if they consistently break the rules or try to undermine the process that they will be asked to step outside the circle for a period of time. This has not had to be done.

d. Timing/activities:

Even with our limited experience with the process we have observed that 30 minutes is about the optimum time for the actual circle time activities. With our 50 minute periods it leaves us 20 minutes for administrative and organisational tasks. We have found short rather than lengthy activities with time for structured reflection (whether shared or personal) works best. The School Counsellor also observed that students seemed to respond to activities that involved moving around and interaction with peers.

Evaluation

During this process I used my own observations, those of other Core Team members and different types of students surveys (responses to prompts eg. strength cards, and responses to questions) to evaluate the process.

To evaluate the students response to circle time I used two types of surveys. At the end of the first session with my group I placed a number of strength cards on the floor, asked them to choose one that reflected how they felt about the circle time session and then asked them to write down why they had chosen that word.

Of the 23 students present for the first circle time session, 18 students chose cards that suggested a very positive reaction to the process. Three more chose positive words, but could not articulate the reasons why they chose them. One student was 'luke warm' in her response and one stated she did not choose a card because there were none left. Further observation of this student revealed an inherent weakness in the evaluation process that I had used. I did not put down cards that could have invited a negative response, therefore there was not a card on the floor that reflected how she felt. Her negativity partly arose from my lack of sensitivity to the fact that for part of the session she was placed next to the School Counsellor and later, quite inadvertently, put into a pair with the same person. She had recently had a negative experience with counselling and the School Counsellor was not her favourite person at that stage. It made me aware that even when conducting circle time sessions you need to be aware of some of the underlying issues in the group and manipulate things accordingly. I was encouraged however that the majority of students felt positive about their first circle time experience. Following this experience I determined that for the next circle time session I would develop a more formal set of questions that allowed students to make positive as well as critical responses.

The next survey combined 2 types of responses. The first were 9 statements, 8 of which were positive and one negative. The students had to rate these from strongly agree through to strongly disagree. What I hoped to achieve from these statements was an indication of whether the students still felt positive about circle time, and whether they thought it had helped them to know and understand their classmates better. This gave me the opportunity to quantify the student's response more accurately. These were followed by three statements which gave students the chance to expand on the responses they made in the first part of the survey. I was mindful here of the advice of McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1996,) regarding questionnaires.

"The advantage [of closed questions] are that they require less space for answers and the answers are easier to chart. Their limitation is that you will never get back any answers that fall outside the range you have specified...Open questions are better because they allow the respondent to express a broader range of ideas."

Learning from my experience of the first session I provided the students with more opportunity to be critical. I thought that students would respond to the first or second, that they would be either more positive or more negative about the circle time experience. But the students were more astute than I was, and 33 out of the 45 students responded to both the positive and critical statement giving me some excellent feedback to guide future sessions.

There were 45 students from two Year 7 classes surveyed following the second circle time session. A general review of the response to the questions suggests that the students are fairly positive about the circle time experience and reasonably positive about this process in developing and fostering better understanding and relationships within the group. In response to the rather bold statement that *'circle time is a waste of time'* over 40 out of 45 students disagreed or strongly disagreed, 3 were neutral and 1 agreed. Although students did not have to name their surveys, I did take note of the student whose survey responses were generally negative. This student is one of our more challenging Year 7 students and also the student who had a negative experience with the first circle time session. It will be interesting to see what her response is to subsequent sessions.

The students were very positive about the less challenging aspects of circle time as suggested by the first three statements. 40 or more students agreed that the process of circle time allowed them to tap into people's feelings and allowed everybody a chance to speak. Only 4 students were neutral and only 1 disagreed. At this stage we can then conclude that the actual process of circle time does create the opportunity for all students to have their say which does not always happen in other types of class discussions.

Responses to statements 4,6,and 7 were more varied. Here I was trying to tap into students thoughts on the more challenging aspects of students relationships and how circle time could assist in developing greater understanding between students. Although most responses were at the positive end of the scale, 33 either agreeing or strongly agreeing, 11 were not sure and 1 disagreed. Similarly with statement 7, even more students, 23 this time, showed less confidence in the circle time process. Students were again less confident about the ability of circle time to improve relationships between students.

The Core Team have been encouraged by the students' positive reactions, but we have found that the survey has raised more questions than it has answered. Our curiosity has certainly been raised as to why the students responses were different between the two groups are why they were uncertain about the value of circle time to improve relationships in their class. The second section of the survey, allowing students to respond more freely to the statements, has given us some further clues. The responses to the second question are particularly revealing. Discussing these as a Core Team we have concluded at this stage that they reveal a lack of confidence with the circle time process. There were at least twenty statements for the students that refer to a lack of honesty, a lack of trust in the other students and therefore an unwillingness to be completely honest. We felt the use of words such as 'awkward, uncomfortable, unsafe and under pressure' were particularly revealing. For me the statement that presents us with the most significant challenge at this stage is *"it's hard to get out what you really feel. You say the main things but it is the little things that need to be discussed."* I am concluding that the 'little things' are paradoxically the 'big' things that need to be brought out into the open if relationships are really going to improve.

Reflection

I feel that this is a crucial stage of the project and how we proceed is going to have a significant impact on how the students perceive the value of circle time and also the importance we place on their assessments.

At this stage the Core Team has concluded:

- The overall response of the students has been positive, which matches our observations
- The critical responses to circle time probably stem from a lack of confidence in the process. I have been able to share with the Core Team the knowledge I gained from listening to other PGDES(SW) students on our presentation day, who were more experienced practitioners of circle time, which suggests that the more you practice circle time the more the students gain respect for the process. This has presented a further problem for us which I will discuss in a later part of the report.
- Surveys of the type we conducted are useful but limited. "Even an open question closes off possibilities because it sets boundaries for the answers that can be given." (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). It has lead us to now factor into our process the use of focus groups to flesh out some of the more sensitive issues raised on the survey. I intend to establish a focus group of 6 –8 students before conducting my third circle time session. I will follow the advice in the National Quality Schooling Framework (Action Research Readings, 2006). I have drawn up the questions but time has not allowed me to meet with the group before the completion of this report.
- Reality of course has made us trim our ideas, and at the stage of writing this report we had completed some circle time sessions with two out of five Year 7 groups and one Year 10 group. This has proved useful because it has meant that we can evaluate the circle time process with students at very different age groups and periods of development.

Despite some of the practical difficulties involved with conducting this pilot, the Core Team remain committed to circle time. The concept of the circle and structured discussion has:

- Promoted discussion

- Engaged all class members to participate in all activities
- Given the teacher the means to control and channel the behaviour of those students who wish to be the centre of attention at all times
- Created further opportunities for students within the class to work more close with those who are not necessarily their close friends.

Conclusion and future directions:

What then of the future for circle time and restorative justice at our school? Achieving the short term goals provides an organisational challenge, but the reality is that if we are sufficiently strategic we will only set out to do in the short term what we know we can achieve. Fullan (1999), however, warns against only working with like minded people to effect change. "Small groups of self selected reformers apparently seldom influence their peers. They just create an even greater gap between themselves and others, which eventually becomes impossible to bridge." (p. 21). However, I have achieved what I set out to do for this project. Fortunately, because of my position in the school, I am automatically a member of a number of key policy making committees in the school. For the last 18 months I have been a member of a MindMatters task force which in some sense has been conducting its own 'action research project' into the ways in which MindMatters practices could be adopted at our school to improve student wellbeing. At our most recent meeting I was able to offer the adoption of restorative practices as a strategy that our school could undertake to improve student and staff wellbeing. The MindMatters group then agreed to recommend to the Education Committee that our Core Team be sent to a two day in service conducted by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne to plan the implementation of Restorative Justice at our school over the next two years. My real challenge is sustaining a project over a two year period. The staff will be genuine participants who will be seen to be practising restorative justice techniques in every aspect of their roles as teachers. So much change is foisted upon staff that I believe they have developed a way of complying for the duration, until someone comes up with the next fad. Marsh's warning is also very appropriate here. (Marsh, 2000) In response to the question 'which innovations last?' his response is a blunt; "...not many! Many traditional school practices continue to endure, despite attempts over the decades to bring about change. At different periods particular innovations appear to be the catch-cry for all stakeholders only to fall into oblivion a few years later." (p. 395). Compliance does not bring about any real change, rather it tends to develop disgruntled cynics who always find ways to consciously or unconsciously subvert the process. The advice proffered by Marcus (2000) is encouraging. He argues that "the goal of change ...is not necessarily to prevent forces of change from emerging, but rather to manage them productively, to weaken rather than strengthen them." (p. 174) He further suggests that dealing with resistance to change is similar to managing conflict and can be handled in a similar fashion.

A further challenge for our school in particular is that a new principal has been appointed who will start next year. This is always an unsettling time for many staff, so again introducing too much change next year may result in very negative reactions. What I have concluded then is to focus next year on training key people, i.e. the 8 House Coordinators in the use of conferencing for students who are in conflict. This should create real change at a specific level without involving all staff directly. I also intend to include some circle time practices in our pastoral classes, particularly at the beginning of the year. This will give me an opportunity to skill the Middle School House Group teachers in the use of one aspect of restorative practices within the context of our pastoral program. The latter is perhaps change by covert rather than overt action. Staff who are involved in conferencing (that is staff other than the coordinators) will hopefully be made ware of some of the aspects of restorative justice before in-servicing the whole school early next year.

I also intend to continue the work of the Core Team which will include the current five members plus at least one parent who has already been canvassed and is very keen to be involved.

Another important aspect of completing this project has been being made aware of the diverse range of programs and strategies that are available and the ways in which they can complement one another in a school in the development of a student well being program. I have also been further encouraged when listening to various presentations that we as educators in schools, whether primary or secondary, Government,

Independent or Catholic, all face similar and occasionally daunting challenges. We should all be encouraged by the words of Fullan:

“...the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness. It is less about strategy and more about strategizing. And it **is** rocket science, not the least because we are inundated with complex, unclear, and often contradictory advice...the goal is to develop a mind-set and action set that are constantly cultivated and refined. There are no short cuts.” (2001, p.31 & 32)