

School Based Research Project 2017 Interim Report Key College (Youth Off The Streets)

Project overview

This project aims to investigate how implementing restorative practices improves student learning and social outcomes across multiple school sites. It specifically addresses the research question: *How does the use of restorative practices in Youth Off The Streets school settings improve student learning and social outcomes?*

Restorative practices are grounded in building social capital — a network of relationships that can respond effectively to wrong doing, restore social order, and create a healthy and positive organisational environment. Restorative practices move away from punitive practices, and towards inclusion. They provide a space where individuals can take responsibility, learn from and support each other through building social capital (Morrison, 2005). Restorative practices ask the question: “How do my actions impact others?”

This research explores the benefits and limitations of the whole school approach and will provide examples of evidence based practice. It is envisaged that the project will identify the characteristics that make restorative practices effective in Youth Off The Streets (YOTS) schools.



The research team

The research team is led by Lou Single, Education Director, and supported by academic mentor Dr Kimberley Pressick-Kilborn (University of Technology Sydney). Prior to September, 2016 the team was led by Tonnia Johanson, Manager: National Scholarship Program.

Project design

This project utilises action research methodology with the research design focusing on evidence based educational change and improvement (Mertler, 2006; Riel, 2010). The project design includes the following:

- systematic gathering of information about current implementation of restorative practices
- identification of areas for specific change and development
- development of professional knowledge and skills to inform change (reading research literature, professional learning sessions, peer mentoring)
- gathering of data to evaluate the impact of the specific changes
- plan for continued refinement of restorative practices implementation.

Data collection varied among the different YOTS sites, and included:

- student reflections and reflection boards
- student questionnaires and interviews
- pre and post intervention school data
- morning circles and student rules
- submission and attendance rates
- films and film questionnaires
- teacher recordings
- school quantitative data
- day book records
- teacher daily diaries.

YOTS staff engaging in this research project are increasing their skills and capacities for conducting practitioner research and developing greater research literacy. This will enable them to systematically investigate future focus areas in their classrooms and across school sites.

Progress to date

Results of an initial survey of YOTS staff indicated specific areas of need for teacher professional learning. This has informed subsequent professional learning interventions for all school staff in 2016, focusing specifically on increasing teacher knowledge, skills, capacities and confidence in using a range of restorative practice strategies, and the Life Space Crisis Intervention (Long, Wood, & Fecser, 2001).

A staff member at each YOTS site was identified as a champion for the project during the initial professional learning session. Part of the champion's role was to maintain a focus on the project amongst the staff and students at their school site.



Restorative practices and learning outcomes

A significant development in the project occurred in Term 3 of 2016, with the implementation of action research projects across each of the school campuses. Over two Staff Development Days, Dr Pressick-Kilborn — the project mentor — introduced all YOTS staff to the action research process. Staff from each school site worked collaboratively, with the assistance of the project team, to identify and develop their own research question based on the general guiding research question “How do my actions impact others?”

- Key College: How can restorative practices be used to improve student attendance?
- Chapel Campus: How does students’ understanding of Circles (Pranis, Stuart & Wedge, 2003) impact their resolution abilities?
- Step-Up Campus: How can we strengthen and encourage student accountability for actions and behaviours through a restorative approach?
- Eden College: What happens to student perceptions of gratitude if we teach and model thankfulness?
- Craig Davis College: How can we encourage social responsibility through improved community cleanliness and high expectations of hygiene?

The variety of focus areas is indicative of the unique needs of each school site. Using established Circles practice (Pranis, Stuart & Wedge, 2003) and pastoral care time, YOTS teachers focus on issues ranging from attendance and accountability to communal responsibility.

Currently, data gathered at each site are being analysed and each school will report its findings to the research team in early 2017. In Terms 2 and 3 of 2017, school staff will be engaged in a second iteration of the action research process, with the option of continuing their investigation on the same issue, or identifying a new issue.

The combination of professional learning and action research has proven to be particularly significant in providing staff with the knowledge, understanding and belief that their practices make a difference and that action research is a whole school project with meaning beyond the research team.

Where to next?

Evaluations across the sites in late 2016 and early 2017 will provide data for a second professional learning intervention. There will be ongoing collection of student data comprising baseline, mid-line and end-point surveys. In this second year it is anticipated that further

development of action research capabilities of all staff will be noticeable. This will provide opportunities for embedding action research skills and knowledge in professional practice, enabling staff to collect data and use empirical evidence to inform future directions in their practice. This aspect of the research project will continue to be supported by Dr Pressick-Kilborn and the research team. The nature of continual development will also support further systematic inquiry into use of restorative practices, and consolidate the project goal of investigating how YOTS’ staff are using restorative practices strategies to promote learning and social outcomes.



References

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