

Dafydd Morris

Winston Churchill Fellow 2012



Restorative Practices in Australian Schools

Report on my visit to Australia July/August 2012

Itinerary

Brisbane

July 13th Villanova College am to meet Graham George

Pm Sue Attrill – Behaviour Support Murumba

July 14th Marg Thorsborn – Thorsborn International

Monday 16th Grace Lutheran College to meet Nicole Gregory

Cairns

July 17th am Cairns West State School – Michael Hansen

Pm Trinity Bay High School – Staff Group

July 18th – Tom O'Donnell Student Support Services Cairns

Sydney

July 25th - Holy Family Emerton – Brenda Kennedy

July 26th - Rozelle – Stephanie Searle and Michel Banks

Geelong

July 30th – Hamlyn Heights – Ross Hayward

July 31st – Oberon High School – Craig O'Brien

August 1st – Sue Langley – Geelong Behaviour Support

August 3rd – am Phillipa Lovell – Catholic Schools Support Service

Pm

Adelaide

August 7th – Graham Shugg – Charles Campbell College

August 8th – Bronwyn Holliday – Good Shepherd Lutheran

The aim of my fellowship was to go and visit schools and support services who used Restorative Practices in their establishments, and to gain and insight into their uses and benefits with the aim of establishing them in my own school, and within our County cluster.

I first got interested in Restorative Practices in early 2011. I started reading about the benefits of RP's and managed to convince my headteacher to invest in some inset training for key pastoral staff. This was led by Paul Carlile, who by the end of the day had all staff convinced of its uses and benefits.

For the last 12 months, these staff have been using RP mainly to deal with bullying incidents and incidents between staff and students. The incidence of recurring issues have been significantly reduced since the implementation of RP, but the next step was to get it implemented at grass roots level so that things did not escalate to require a restorative meeting.

This led me to looking at schools that RP are well established and it seemed to me that Australian schools led the way in this respect, which resulted in my application for a fellowship.

Having landed, and partially recovered from my jet lag, I set forth on my visits. I started my visits at Villanova College for boys where I met with Graham George. Graham lives and breathes RP and just one look at the wealth of information on RP on the school website is testament to his belief and commitment to RP.

RP were well and truly entrenched at Villanova, and the school was extremely fortunate to be able to provide new members of staff on a 3 day training course to ensure they understood the concepts and principles of RP and how they could use them in every aspect of their work. This was extremely important to the school, and showed its intent to have RP form the core of the school's ethos, but

something I would find virtually impossible to implement at my school. The fact that it was a Public School enabled it find the resources to enable them to fund it.

Graeme had produced in depth handbooks for staff who were new to the school, and one for staff who had been in the school for a few years to use as an aide memoire.

From talking to Graham, it seemed clear that RP were at the heart of Villanova. Even a new build had been created around RP – a new yr 9 and 10 building had just been completed as the school had questioned how students could move up into senior school and begin afresh unless they could actively feel it to be different, hence the new build. Graham also felt strongly that RP needed to be on the staff calendar for every new term staff meeting, and things should constantly be in a process of development and that it should not be allowed to stagnate.

As it was an Augustinian faith school, RP were closely linked to those values. The aim was to develop self-discipline, and this was done through the use of RP through acknowledging the consequence's of ones actions and by then making amends. RP focuses on the person whilst challenging the negative behaviour, which is closely linked to Augustine's call to "Love the sinner" and "Hate the sin." The RP approach recognises the value of relationships and community, which is a central Augustinian value

I really enjoyed my visit to Villanova and was hugely impressed with the depth of knowledge that Graham possessed and his obvious passion for RP. It was clear to me that RP were an integral part of Villanova and they were used in all aspects of school life. This was enabled by the fact that it was a fee paying school which enabled it to have a greater degree of flexibility with regards to training which would be extremely challenging to be able to implement to the same extent at Ysgol Dinas Brân.

My next visit was to Sue Attrill who coordinates the Behaviour Support Services for the Murrumba region. Sue

was in the process of implementing RP in the 8 schools within her area . The process had got underway with a framework for support which was split into 2, the processes in the schools and the support they would expect to receive from the Behaviour Support team. The schools part began with approval from the SLTs of each school and following this an audit of school was made looking at data/policies etc and what already existed in the schools. Strengths and obstacles were then looked at then a plan for development and support and finally creating a culture to ensure staff bought in to it. Alongside this, the Behaviour Support Team presented to schools their vision for RP, mapped existing processes, did a SWOT analysis of each individual school, worked with schools to negotiate what support and resources would be provided and finally embed RP and its philosophy into these schools.

Sue was pretty much at the start of the process with the initial the strengths and weaknesses process but was pleased with the positive response from the schools. She felt that it was very important to develop the use of RP in secondary schools, as it was pretty well integrated into the feeder primaries, especially the use of Circle Time. This was a common theme that I recognized during my time in Australia, one which is similar in the UK, where RP were routinely used in primaries, with the use of Circle Time being a strength, but in secondary schools this very useful tool does not get used.

This is a huge shame, as Circle Time provides the opportunity for group discussions and provides students with the opportunity to discuss issues in a safe and secure situation. This will be my initial aim when I return, to get Circle Time implemented at Ysgol Dinas Brân, and for it to be used during registration and PSE sessions to begin with. Long term, it can be used by all staff to resolve classroom issues, and it is a fantastic resource which can

be used to stimulate class discussions on the topic being covered.

During my time in Noosa, I managed to squeeze in a visit with Marg Thorsborne, of Thorsborne Associates, who are well respected trainers of RP not only in Australia but worldwide. Marg had managed to fit me in between coming home from New Zealand and going off to Japan, so we met over a coffee.

She was such an interesting person, and one who absolutely lived and breathed RP. We shared contacts, and I have already met her back in November when she came over to take a course in London, and am now working with her staff over here arranging staff training for my school, but also a member of her staff is due to come up and speak to the headteachers of our county with the hope of making it a county wide initiative.

My next visit was to Grace Lutheran College in Rothwell, Queensland, around an hour north of Brisbane. Again, this was a fee paying school, with a strong Christian tradition and values. I met with Nicole Gregory, Ruth Doyle, Cheryl Budd and Ruth Allen, all who have senior responsibilities within the pastoral system.

The situation here was that they are in the process of implementing RP with varying degrees of success. They started implementing it in 2008, and have currently trained up a number of staff to facilitate conferences-the number of conferences required has gone down each year which suggests it is working. Their target is to get all staff trained – 1200 students and 100 staff over 2 campuses. Circle Time is used widely as a pastoral tool, and regularly in lessons.

RP is built around the Christian faith in Grace Lutheran, and they still have a list of consequences, and are currently reviewing what is done in detentions – currently doing lines.

Ruth Doyle, headteacher, has been in place for 2 years, and came from a school that was fully using RP, whilst the

previous head of Grace Lutheran had been there for 30 years and had started the process.

There is an RP committee that discusses issues and takes them to SLT. There is a handbook for staff, students and parents, and it is clear that there is a desire to make RP a priority at the school.

From Brisbane, I headed up to Cairns, and went to meet Michael Hansen, head of Cairns West Primary School. There were 640 students at the time of my visit, with 90% coming from indigenous backgrounds, and a significant number were Torres Strait Islanders. Only 4 parents have mortgages which gives a fair idea of the socio economic background of the students, and many students live with extended families having moved away from Torres Straits to attend school in Cairns.

There is a big focus on literacy in the school, as many students come with little or no skills, and they actively encourage the community to come into school to help/take part in literacy sessions.

The first thing Michael did when he started was to do a DVD of the school and he made sure that it featured every child and gave a free copy to all families. He invites mums in to help make coffee for staff, trains them how to use café style utensils which then enables them to gain employment in local cafes, then trains another group up and so on. He has received a grant which enabled a new library to be built which is a fantastic learning resource and is used by the community also.

RP are used in the school, and it was clear when I walked through classrooms with Michael, that there was an extremely happy and vibrant atmosphere within the school, and every classroom I visited there was a strong emphasis on developing the literacy skills of the students , which was essential if they were to make progress both educationally and emotionally.

From there, I visited Trinity Bay High School, and met with the headteacher Michael Woodcock and Tom O'Donnell who worked for Student Support Services. There was a clear focus on supporting the needs of the indigenous students within the school with a multi agency approach involving ESW and the Police. There was a boxing club for indigenous students for both boys and girls, for those students deemed at risk, and there was also a link with the local AFL team, with an indigenous player coming in to mentor indigenous student and that was working particularly well.

Tom worked closely with students who were at risk of becoming disaffected and permanently excluded from school, and worked closely with the school to ensure this did not happen. His work was making links with parents and encouraging them to take a more active role in parenting and mentoring the students and getting them involved with the different schemes they had in place. There was no clear focus on RP in Trinity Bay, but there was a firm commitment to developing relationships with students and the wider community, but at the moment there was no follow on to the work done in primaries and Circle Time was not a priority.

From here, we moved on to Sydney, where I visited Sister Brenda Kennedy, Principal of Holy Family Emerton. Brenda was quite a character, and had been forced to move to Australia in the mid seventies by the Catholic Church to become a teacher. She has been headteacher since the school opened in 2004, and she had a hands on involvement in the building of the school. She ensured the classrooms were oval in shape to follow the Indigenous peoples beliefs that learning happens in a circle, and a large proportion of students were from Indigenous backgrounds and low socio-economic conditions. Brenda had a strong Restorative background, and the school based its philosophy around RP and resolving incidents using the Restorative principles. There were a lot

of incidents when the school opened, many disputes coming in to school from the communities, but through mediation and working restoratively with students and their parents, Brenda has succeeded in creating a fantastic community school with superb facilities. My second visit in Sydney was to Rozelle Public School, and after the initial surprise that Stephanie, the principal, was expecting a female, “Daph” I received a lovely welcome. Stephanie had been in place for 2 years and had started re-introducing RP into Rozelle. Rozelle had been at the forefront of RP a few years ago, and was held up as a beacon of good practice, but when Stephanie became principal, it had started to falter, and as any initiative, needed to be looked at again and reinvigorated the staff’s use of them.

Michael Bancks, the Assistant Principal, has been at the school for 20 plus years, and is the driving force behind RP at Rozelle. I was privileged to sit in on a Circle Time with his form group, and had the opportunity to see how things worked first hand. Michael encouraged his students to use their own problem solving skills to resolve issues between each other themselves. One incident occurred whilst the class were queuing for class. A student came to Michael to say another had pushed in and said something mean to him. Michael did not sort the issue out as is the norm for teachers to do, but told him to go and speak to the other child and tell him how him pushing in had made him feel.

This, I saw, was the norm, and a refreshing change to what I am used to and I am certain most other teachers are used to. The students were encouraged to solve their own problems, using restorative language as part of the process. This goes against the grain of most teachers who feel the need to solve issues themselves, but it must be the way forward if we are going to provide our students with opportunities to develop and learn how to resolve

issues themselves, and teach them how to become resilient, problem solving individuals.

I was unable to visit Terrasancta, as I had to take my son to hospital after he had cut his foot open in the apartments swimming pool!

On to Geelong, where my first visit was to Hamlyn Banks where I met with the principal Ross Hayward. The order of the day was a Circle Time at 9am with a year 5/6 class followed by a tour of the school with Ross. Then I met with Robyn Welsh a year 5/6 teacher before attending a year 1/2 Circle Time, before rounding off the day with meeting the school captains!

There were about 280 students at Hamlyn Banks, and there is a wide range of socio economic status amongst the families within the catchment area, but they have a low percentage of indigenous students. All staff have received training in RP, Circle Time is used extensively, and I was lucky enough to be invited to participate in 2 circles during my visit. There was a lovely atmosphere present in the school, and Ross was one of the most passionate people I met during my time out there and a great advocate for the benefits of RP.

From there, I visited Oberon High School, where I met with Assistant Principal Scott McDonald. Scott was pretty honest about the uses of RP at Oberon. There were pockets of good practice within the school, but it was not universally or consistently used within the school. The new head previously had been headteacher at Swan Hill, where RP was used extensively, and his aim is to fully introduce it at Oberon, but it was in its infancy at the time of my visit.

They had developed a "Seek out a Solution" framework, where students who were thrown out of class filled in a form with the purpose of looking at alternative ways that they could have dealt with the situation, and similarly the teacher also filled one in to encourage reflective practices. This is the start of the Restorative process, with the

questions being used in the form and the principals behind “SOS” being Restorative ones.

I then met with Sue Langley, who worked for Victoria Education Services, and whose responsibility it was to support and implement RP in schools in the Geelong area. Sue is able to offer training day’s for schools to send their staff on with a minimal charge to the school. This has been exceptionally helpful to schools, as they are able to release new staff to go on training with very little financial cost to them – this would not happen at home as you would have to buy the trainer in to do in house or pay for them to go on an inset course which cost on average £300. Sue also produces a RP newsletter which goes to all the schools in her area, and it has links to various articles etc which gives rise to discussions in school and keeps it on the front burner.

Onward to Melbourne, where I met with Philippa Lovell, the person with responsibility for RP in the Catholic Schools in the Melbourne area. They have developed a handbook which leads schools through the process of introducing RP into their schools, to the implementation and finally how to ensure its maintenance once it has been established.

Its purpose and objectives are

- To support the skilling of all members of the school community in the successful resolution of conflict
- To support the prevention and management of potentially escalating conflict and harm in the school environment
- To model and guide the demonstration of Catholic values in the forgiveness and restoration of community members after breaches in relationships
- To promote the demonstration of the values of equity, respect and inclusivity

Over the last 6 years, over 120 primary and secondary schools in the Melbourne area have come on board with RP. It is not compulsory, but Philippa and her team

actively encourage schools, and actively encourage schools who have come on board to have a positive influence on other schools in their neighbourhood. Philippa organizes training for staff, and as in Geelong with Jane Langley, it was termly and did not have a high cost, therefore it encouraged schools to get on board and continue upskilling their staff.

Philippa was very honest about the fact that some schools stated that they were Restorative, but were still punitive, but these were in the minority, and that most schools wholeheartedly embraced the ethos as it has so many similarities to the Catholic faith.

Philippa had organised me to visit St Anne's, a small primary school in the Kew area and to meet the Principal John Connors. John showed me around the school and explained that the students were very fortunate and were of a middle to high socio economic status, so concerns regarding welfare etc were few and far between. He stated that the school worked restoratively, and in particular focused on dealing with bullying issues in this way. There is also a clear statement on the website stating that the school aims to work restoratively and restore relationships wherever possible.

From Melbourne, my final destination was Adelaide, and my first visit was to Charles Campbell College to meet with Graham Shugg, who was Assistant Principal, but had recently stepped down.

This was a pretty sad tale, as Charles Campbell a few years ago was held up as a fine example of a restorative school, and Graham had developed a fantastic team of motivated and caring staff. The school had a high level of deprivation and the students came from challenging backgrounds, but it was obvious that Graham felt a great pride in what he had achieved at the school.

Unfortunately, 2 years ago, the school was amalgamated with the secondary school across the road. This had a devastating impact on the school, with many staff moving and new staff were not trained up and mentored and there was a huge loss of experienced staff. One of the main reasons for RP losing ground was that the head of the secondary school did not put RP on his list of priorities, and as there was no member of the new SLT in the primary, the school had become leaderless and rudderless and was currently drifting along, despite there being many dedicated staff still working restoratively.

Graham had decided to move on and was currently still in post but looking for a new challenge. Such a shame that the head of the “new” school did not have the vision to implement RP throughout the whole school and a lot of knowledge and experience has been lost.

My final visit was to meet Bronwyn Holliday at the Good Shepherd Lutheran School. Good Shepherd seemed to be at the stage that Charles Campbell was a few years ago. Whilst I was shown around the school, the atmosphere was extremely positive and there was a purposeful attitude to be felt in lessons. It was only a short visit as Bronwyn had been called away unexpectedly, but it was a lovely end to my time in Australia.

Overall my experience in Australia was a fabulous experience not only for myself, but for my wife and 2 boys who had a marvellous time, from surfing in Noosa, cuddling wallabies in the Daintree to experiencing the sheer beauty of the Ocean Road

Just as valuable were the experiences I had from visiting colleagues in schools and establishments, and discussing the uses of RP and how best to implement it. From schools who were barely touching the sides of RP to schools who fully embraced the ethos of RP, I valued all of my experiences equally.

Since coming home, I have introduced RP to our staff, hoping some will dip their toe in it, and am currently planning some training in January focussing on circle time, and then hoping that I can book Marg's staff to come up in March to provide us with a day's training for the whole of our staff, and the aim is to start the process of becoming a restorative school, but it is the start of a long journey but one that will be well worth making.

Secondly, I am leading our County Behaviour and Inclusion Group, who are looking to implement RP on a county basis. From this, we can hopefully share good practice with neighbouring authorities and roll RP out through the country.