

Three Worlds Collide: Celebrating the alignment of Restorative Practices, Positive Education and Mindfulness in school settings

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Future Directions: Counselling, Consultancy, Training

Abstract:

Over the past ten years schools have been bombarded with different programs and teacher training to meet the growing and changing needs of complex school communities.

Many schools are recognizing the humanistic changes a restorative approach can bring to difficult interactions. Some schools are starting to introduce the concept of positive education by introducing the language of strengths, resilience based programs and teacher training on positive engagement and building positive relationships. Even fewer schools are benefiting from the gift of Mindfulness through stillness meditation and present moment awareness. Intuitively Restorative Practices, Positive Education and Mindfulness sit together, not alongside each other as independent strategies, but enmeshed in philosophy, practice and outcomes. Each of these approaches have scientific research to indicate higher levels of connectedness, mental health and wellbeing and lower levels of feelings of isolation reducing the impact of mental health risk factors.

This paper examines these three significant yet often isolated initiatives and introduces how, when seen through a different lens, a more holistic approach, can enhance the already exciting outcomes of Restorative Practices, Positive Education and Mindfulness. Individually each of these initiatives offers great support to transform school culture, however, when implemented as a part of a complete strategy their benefits are multiplied. The aim of this paper is to ignite interest in exploring current practice, promoting explicit teaching of each approach, identifying challenges, ultimately encouraging a broadening of the view of pastoral and well being programs to becoming holistic philosophies embedded in policy, curriculum and welfare practices.

Intuitively Restorative Justice, Mindfulness and Positive Psychology in Education sit together, enmeshed, in an educational setting. However, many schools tend to use each approach in isolation, or silos, if they use mindfulness at all. Each approach is humanistic in its philosophy, each can help celebrate all that is the human condition, the good, the bad and the ugly, or to quote Jon Kabat Zinn (1990) “the full catastrophe!”

Restorative Justice is often described as an alternative to the philosophy of retributive justice (crime and punishment). Restorative justice considers crime as causing harm to another person or community rather than a violation against a rule or law set by a governing body such as the state or school. It aims for an understanding of the impact on those harmed, and understanding of those who harm. Accountability and ownership to be accepted by those who harm and for them to take responsibility to repair the harm they have caused. Restoration, making things right, becomes the highest priority rather than the imposition of punishment of the offender. By taking accountability offenders begin to understand the harm they have caused thus deterring future offences. Restorative justice fosters a view that we have “bad behaviour” rather than “bad people”. At its most basic level restorative justice focuses on guilt inducing and shame reducing, this enables the offender to regain personal power through restoration.

Restorative justice has been a major focus of school education for many years. Some schools have taken on the approach and flourished, reducing conflict and building more harmonious school communities. Some schools have had partial implementation, using restorative justice for either ‘lower level offences’ or in some schools only for ‘higher level offences’. Some schools have had all staff trained from office administration staff through to leadership and board members, while other schools have had teachers trained. As with other initiatives some schools have participated in training however they have failed to implement any real change in their approach to conflict and harm.

Key Points:

- *Building relationships*
- *Accountability and ownership*
- *Building social capacity*
- *Improving social problem solving*
- *Encouraging forgiveness*
- *Building interpersonal skills – active listening, patience, emotional regulation*

Benefits of Restorative Justice:

- *Conflicts are resolved, reducing ongoing issues*
- *Builds empathy and understanding*
- *Students are more prepared to take responsibility for their actions*
- *Decreases re-offending*
- *Increases student engagement and attendance*
- *Increases the development of values such as respect, compassion, acceptance, trust*

Positive Education can be defined as “education for traditional skills and for happiness” (Seligman – Penn Resiliency Program). Using the research findings from the field of Positive Psychology, positive education focuses on developing awareness in students of their strengths and values. Active and explicit teaching of strengths and values has been shown to increase levels of curiosity, love of learning and creativity, gratitude and to foster engagement and connectedness to others as well as to school. Students display higher levels of enjoyment and improved social skills such as cooperation, empathy, responsibility and self-control.

Increasingly Positive Psychology has been contributing to the field of education and in particular to values-based pastoral programs for schools. Many schools are developing whole school approaches to wellbeing due to the historical work on positivity, resilience and optimism by psychologists such as Martin Seligman, Barbara Fredrikson, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Chris Peterson, Sonia Lyubomirsky and Alex Linley to name but a few.

Traditionally school education has focused on thinking skills, analytical skills, achievement, conformity, discipline and test taking. School has been seen as the incubation time before heading out into the ‘real’ world of adulthood and employment. With a growth in mental health issues across the population including children and young people, schools are faced with higher student needs and complex social and familial circumstances in which they conduct their teaching. Neuro-scientific research shows that positive emotions and interventions can bolster health, achievement and resilience, and can buffer against depression, and anxiety (Seligman, Templeton Positive Neuroscience Awards 2011). This has become the work of school education.

Key points:

- *Promotes personal growth*
- *Enhances an engaged life*
- *Builds meaningful relationships*
- *Promotes choices*
- *Encourages savouring, positivity and optimism*
- *Identifies personal strengths in self and others*
- *Broadens and builds awareness and social capacity*

- *Creates optimal functioning enables community to flourish*

Benefits of Positive Education:

- *School communities flourish, enjoying life, happier, more successful*
- *Increases in self worth, confidence, contribution*
- *Increases in tolerance and acceptance*
- *Decreases in conflict and disengagement*
- *Increases in resilience and connectedness to school*
- *Increases in participation in curriculum*

Mindfulness is often referred to as “moment to moment awareness” (Kabat Zinn, p2 1990). Mindfulness encourages us to deliberately pay attention to the present moment without attachment or judgment. In understanding mindfulness we are accepting that here, in this very moment, we can manage, whatever arises. Mindfulness is actually a practice. It is an evocation, a way of being rather than an idea or strategy. Mindfulness is about attention and awareness, it has universal application. Scientific and medical research in mindfulness, across many countries has shown improved health and wellbeing, happiness, focus, productivity, calmness, increased zest for life, improved plasticity of the brain, increased pain and stress management as well as higher academic performance (Kabat Zinn 1990; Williams & Penman 2011; McCowan et al 2010; Siegal 2010; Hawn 2011; Williams et al 2007; Santorelli 1999; Kashdan & Ciarrochi 2013).

Mindfulness is taught through several mediums including meditation and present moment focused activities. In schools there has recently been several programs developed to introduce mindfulness, encouraging schools to be present-focused enabling students to deal with whatever arises as it happens. A common misunderstanding of mindfulness and meditation is that it is a selfish pursuit, a time we turn inward and only focus on the self. This is far from the truth as it is practiced. Mindfulness builds compassion for ourselves and for others. It builds an understanding of the changing nature of our bodies and breath and with that the fragility of the human experience thus increasing empathy and understanding. It is a vehicle to observe thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them. Mindfulness encourages non-attachment to any one state, even positive states. Students of mindfulness are asked to abandon any belief that their own thoughts and feelings are the literal truth in any situation. In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy where mindfulness is a major focus, the belief is that if you become fused with the positive content of inner self then you seek to remove or reduce negative content. This is done by experiential avoidance which leads to a decrease in mental health (Hayes & Smith 2005) Therefore the practice of mindfulness meditation provides an opportunity to find space within to give a solid, grounded response to any situation.

Key Point:

- *Encourages living in the present moment*
- *Strengthens self awareness*
- *Based on non judgment which builds acceptance*
- *Calms the stress response*
- *Increases an understanding of the brain and its functions*
- *Links between thoughts, emotions, actions*
- *Identifies the mind/body connection*
- *Promotes choice according to values*
- *Stimulates curiosity*
- *Deepens happiness*

Benefits of mindfulness:

- *Increases in acceptance of self and others*
- *Increases in connectedness and kindness*
- *Increases in emotional intelligence*
- *Decreases in conflict and disruptions*
- *Increases coping*
- *Increases positive emotions*

Prevention is naturally one of the major contributors to a successful restorative process. There has been much discussion as to whether prevention is actually part of restorative justice, after all isn't restorative an intervention? A process done after harm has occurred? A broader understanding looks at the continuum of practice as identified by Blood (2004) where relational practices help develop social and emotional capacity preventing the likelihood of harm occurring as often. Blood (2004) went on to identify that developing social and emotional capacity would include encouraging accountability of actions, taking responsibility of actions, working together to create community and developing confidence and personal potency. This is firmly where positive education and mindfulness rest.

Research has also shown that a whole school approach has the greatest impact on change. Whole school needs to include the whole school community – staff (including administration and auxiliary staff), students (all levels), parents and wider community including board members. Including all stakeholders in training and awareness gives a greater, richer level of discussion and ultimately uptake of all initiatives. Parent bodies in particular may need more than just a newsletter article informing them of the current practices of the school. In today's society we have a parent group that are more involved in the education of their children than past generations. This partnership is imperative to improving academic standards. However it can be a hurdle when it comes to non-academic initiatives. Restorative justice, positive education and mindfulness cross over into values and beliefs. They are essential in the school context however the support for these initiatives may not be as easy to obtain. Parents need to have the opportunity for discussion and reflection on the various elements of each approach. Equipping parents with skills through education sessions can decrease their fear of the unknown and enhance the impact of each initiative. Linking each approach to scientific research, data, school vision or charter can also validate the implementation strategy. Ongoing evaluations and in-house data supporting the changes increase the school/home partnership creating a more workable rather than combative environment.

As previously mentioned positive education focuses on developing a greater awareness in students of their strengths and values through the active and explicit teaching of strengths and values. Using Seligman's work on strengths, through structured surveys whole school communities (staff, students and parents) are encouraged to identify their own personal top 24 strengths (see Table 1 below). These strengths are the outward expression of values – our belief systems, what we hold as important navigational tools for living a fulfilled and authentic life. Through classroom activities each of the twenty-four strengths is unpacked and examined. What does it look like, when do you see it in action, how does it feel when you do this strength, how does it feel when others do it? Schools become strength-watchers. Catching out others' strengths, acknowledging and celebrating them. As students become more knowledgeable about their own Top 5 strengths they become more confident, calmer and happier. They are then more likely to focus on bringing more strengths into their daily activities. While all strengths are relative to the prevention of restorative justice, some seem to be more relevant such as *honesty, social intelligence, fairness and equity, self-control and*

self-regulation, perspective, kindness and generosity, citizenship and teamwork and of course curiosity.

Forgiveness & Mercy	Appreciation of Beauty	Curiosity & interest	Gratitude	Love of Learning	Fairness, Equity, Justice
Hope, optimism & future mindedness	Bravery & valor	Social intelligence	Judgment, critical thinking & open mindedness	Leadership	Zest, enthusiasm & energy
Honesty, authenticity & genuineness	Industry, diligence & perseverance	Self control & self regulation	Perspective (wisdom)	Spirituality, sense of purpose, faith	Kindness & generosity
Capacity to love & be loved	Modesty & humility	Citizenship, teamwork & loyalty	Creativity, ingenuity & originality	Humour & playfulness	Caution, prudence & discretion

Table 1: Twenty-four character strengths as identified by the V.I.A. Survey of Character Strengths at the University of Pennsylvania see www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu

Mindfulness also rests firmly in the area of relational practices. Mindfulness purely by its nature builds a more open mindedness approach to each situation. The practice of mindfulness shows us that things change and so we are not threatened when the world we live in also changes. Through mindfulness we decrease our attachment to how things ‘should’ be and develop a softer grip on expectations. This allows us to be more flexible when interacting with our world and decreases the likelihood and impact of disappointment. In mindfulness practices we attempt to remove the egoistic position with less focus on “I”, “Me” or “My” which broadens our sense of connectedness with others, increases our perspective to include others and develops a closer sense of belonging. Both formal and informal practices of mindfulness build empathy and compassion thus reducing the possibility of conflict.

At this point it is worthwhile examining more explicitly the interventionist restorative process and how we can broaden our understanding of the impact of positive education and mindfulness.

Those involved with a restorative process often come to the process with caution and hesitation. There needs to be an element of trust that this system and thereby this process, be it a restorative chat, a small group conference or a community conference, will protect me as victim and also me as offender. Through a greater understanding of positive education we can identify that these hesitations are strengths – *caution and prudence* meaning a person will be careful. Coming together shows *bravery* and courage, a strength that shows a person does not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain. If we have a positive education approach we can talk these strengths through with victims and offenders. Supporting them to develop these strengths, knowing that they have these strengths to draw upon when needed.

Coming together to resolve issues takes a preparedness and enthusiasm to make things better. We need to be able to listen and hear another person’s story. This is supported by mindfulness practice of being in the present moment. Bringing yourself with openness, offering no judgment to this moment, not stuck in past hurt or fearful of the future. We need

optimism, hope and future mindedness to believe things will change and that I don't need to form any attachment to any one state of being. Within the restorative process participants need to have the ability to voice their position. Positive education and Circle Time practices encourage confidence in knowing our own strengths and being able to voice these in front of others without fear of condemnation or judgment. A restorative process is the practice of *citizenship and teamwork*, with all participants working together to achieve a greater good to resolve an issue together.

Restorative processes can of course be daunting for a child or young person, or anyone for that matter, to go through. For offenders to shift from shame to guilt, they need to believe that restoration is indeed possible. With a supportive positive education and mindfulness structure offenders would be familiar with the mindfulness practice that allows the person to watch and observe without judgment. This brings a freedom from self-loathing and a greater understanding of behaviours and actions that are incongruent with values. The formal meditation practice of Loving Kindness encourages a gentler view of self and others. It encourages greater empathy and compassionate understanding of what it is to be human. Offering *forgiveness and understanding* mindfulness practice can help set up how members of communities view conflict and harm differently to historically punitive traditions.

Unpacking the Restorative Process:

What were you thinking about when you?

Who has been affected by what you did, in what ways?

Was what you did right or wrong?

How can you fix this?

How can I support you going forward

In restorative justice we ask, "*What were you thinking about when you*?" Mindfulness practice allows us to develop an observing self, enhancing the sense that we can observe our thoughts and emotions, encouraging self-reflection without self-punishment.

"Who has been affected by what you did, in what ways?" Here we can tap into mindful awareness to be able to step outside the self and view others as important and also by using strengths of *social intelligence* which is the awareness of the motives and feelings of self and others and also *fairness, equity and justice* which identifies the ability to not let our own personal feelings bias our decisions about other people. To know who was affected and how we also need the strengths of *bravery, judgment and critical thinking, honesty and authenticity* and above all *perspective*. We may ask the question "*Was what you did right or wrong?"* Here the offender needs to draw on strengths of *honesty, perspective, critical thinking and bravery*.

When we come to restoring the relationship we ask, "*How can you fix this?"* or "*What do you need to do to make things better?"* At this point offenders are drawing on strengths such as *judgment and critical thinking* – thinking things through; *creativity* – looking for choices; *kindness and generosity* – to offer to help someone. Both offender and victim at this point also draw on strengths of *forgiveness and mercy* – giving others and self a second chance, drawing on the principle of mercy rather than revenge; and also the strength of *citizenship and teamwork* – working together to resolve and move on. A part of the restorative process, especially with children and young people, is to ask further "*How can I support you going forward?"* or "*What can I do to help?"* This question is of course designed to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and ensuring that harm has been repaired. Here participants draw on strengths of *creativity and forgiveness*.

In restorative practices training we encourage facilitators to have the three Ps – Patience, Passion and Perseverance. Having knowledge of strengths-focused living from positive psychology, we know that facilitators draw on all of the twenty-four strengths. Here are some which are essential: *Forgiveness and mercy* – taking their own agenda out of the process; *curiosity* – being interested in how things can change, asking questions rather than telling; *fairness, equity and justice* – treating all people fairly, not letting personal alliances influence the feeling and the process; *hope, optimism and future-mindedness* – expecting the best from these participants and that the future will be positively impacted by this process; *leadership* – encouraging others to get things done, preserving harmony through inclusion; *zest, enthusiasm and energy* – understanding that life is an adventure to met and experienced; *self-control and self-regulation* – regulating what you feel at any point throughout the process; *perspective* – keeping perspective of the age and other variables of the participants, making sense of the world.

Can we build on the restorative process using strengths and mindfulness?

Using a strengths-focused and mindfulness base restorative justice is obviously strengthened and enhanced. However, can we continue to build on the restorative process after a restorative justice chat, small group or community conference has occurred? Perhaps the educational setting can learn from interventions using restorative justice, positive psychology and mindfulness used in prison settings. One such intervention is the Impact of Crime Workshop used in the George Mason University Inmate Recidivism Study in 2002.

The Impact of Crime Workshop is a voluntary group intervention. Sixteen sessions over eight weeks include part educational and part experiential and discussion components. The focus of the workshop is to explore the ripple effect of crime, that is, how crime impacts on victims, their families, offenders' families and the community. The trained facilitator integrates the restorative justice notions of community, personal responsibility and reparation. During discussions blame invariably arises with offenders expressing feelings of shame, guilt or both. Sharing their thoughts and feelings fosters empathy building, openness and collaboration. Following the restorative justice emphasis on 'bad behaviour' not 'bad people' behaviours are gradually viewed as things that can be changed, negative consequences can be repaired and offenders can be redeemed. The research supporting this initiative indicates that shame and guilt are distinct emotions with very different implications for moral and interpersonal behaviour. Shame is the painful focus on the self. It is humiliating and is accompanied by a sense of worthlessness, powerlessness and a feeling of being exposed. Shame is so intolerable that people seek to avoid or escape the feeling by shifting blame onto others and can resort to aggressive and destructive actions. In contrast however, guilt is a sense of tension, remorse and regret over the bad thing done and this motivates reparative action. The Impact of Crime Workshop works to take offenders out of shame where there is inaction and into guilt where action can be taken (Malouf et al in Kashdan & Ciarrochi 2013).

Given the alignment of the three approaches - restorative justice, positive education and mindfulness - it is worth considering how a process can incorporate all of these to support students and enhance the probability of low repeat offending. An Impact of Behaviour process, similar to the Impact of Crime Workshop intervention could reinforce the strengths and values of students involved in serious incidents as well as reinforce the expectation of reparation. Utilising the practice of mindfulness an acceptance of thoughts and feelings would allow for greater personal growth. Traditionally when a serious incident has occurred in educational settings, a support or behaviour management group is established to manage and support the student and the situation. This is prime opportunity to implement an Impact

of Behaviour intervention. The Impact of Behaviour intervention would be a series of meetings facilitated by either the school counselor/psychologist or wellbeing coordinator who has trained in all three practices – restorative justice, positive education and mindfulness. Through a series of structured sessions the student and the facilitator would explore the student’s strengths and values, express gratitude, explore curiosity and perform mindfulness practices that enhance present moment awareness.

Where to from here:

It is imperative that if schools are to continue to focus on mental health and wellbeing that they become proficient at integrating mental health initiatives. Schools, like the rest of society, have become what is commonly known as ‘time poor’. There is a continual rise in the pressure for schools to address many issues not previously seen as their core educational work. In order to maintain quality teachers within their profession it is vital that mental health initiatives are better funded for training to be more accessible and the initiatives are easily implemented within the already crowded curriculum.

There have been wonderful developments in the training of schools in restorative justice over the past ten years. A broadening of training foci has brought about a greater awareness of the role of relationships, emotional intelligence, educational strategies such as circle time and cooperative learning. The newer developing areas are positive education and mindfulness. Teacher training in each of these areas – restorative, positive education and mindfulness – needs to draw on the links between each one to ensure teachers understand why and how these approaches support and align. Inclusive training may improve uptake of each of the approaches and also increase the authenticity and commitment to a more consistent implementation across staff. If teachers are aware, they can bring in a strengths, mindfulness and restorative focus to everyday conversations with students and parents. Schools often have different pastoral or resilience-based programs in place. For a true alignment and integration of restorative, positive education and mindfulness to occur we need to begin with a thorough audit of current practices and at what level they sit i.e.: are they preventative or interventionist? Do they ensure the development of social and emotional capacity? Are the links explicit or implicit? We need to develop our understanding that if we have Circle Time or a stand alone pastoral program in our classrooms that that is enough to support restorative justice. Currently there is a slow growth of schools prepared to take on a whole school approach to strengths-based positive education. Research both here in Australia and overseas is indicating that a whole school approach with best practice staff training and mentoring from positive psychology specialists will reap great rewards for schools. Mindfulness in schools is lagging behind. We need continued research into the efficacy of implementing mindfulness in schools and greater training for both professionals and educational staff.

Understanding the overlap and efficacy of all these approaches can only enhance a school community into building constructive and connected relationships between all members of the school community. Ultimately, positively resolving conflicts so that children and young people can make mistakes and grow together in the reparation of those mistakes will create happier school environments.

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