RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN IRISH SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

Teachers' Perspectives on Promoting Student Wellbeing

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Introduction

Student wellbeing is an increasing priority in Irish post-primary education, with schools encouraged to foster positive, inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Restorative practices (RP) offer an alternative to traditional punitive approaches to discipline by emphasising relationships, empathy, accountability and repairing harm through dialogue (Wachtel, 2016).

Despite their alignmnet with Irish wellbeing policy (DES, 2018), implementation varies across schools due to challenges including limited training, time constraints and inconsistent whole-school support.



RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH DIALOGUE

Research Aim & Questions

To explore Irish secondary school teachers' perspectives on restorative practices (RP), focusing on their implementation, challenges and role in promoting student wellbeing.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive and implement RP in their classrooms?
2. What challenges affect the integration of RP within existing school structures?
3. What factors support successful and sustainable implementation?

Methodology

01 **Research Design:** A quantitative, single-site case study was conducted within one Irish post-primary school, adopting a positivist research approach.

02 **Data Collection:** An online questionnaire, developed using Google Forms, gathered data on teachers' familiarity with restorative practices, frequency of use, perceived effectiveness and implementation challenges.

03 **Participants & Sampling:** Convenience sampling was employed. The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 30 teachers, with 24 valid responses received.

04 **Data Analysis:** Responses were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, identified key trends. Open-ended responses were grouped into recurring themes.

05 **Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was obtained from Hibernia College. Participation was voluntary, and responses were anonymised and treated confidentially in accordance with GDPR and BERA guidelines.

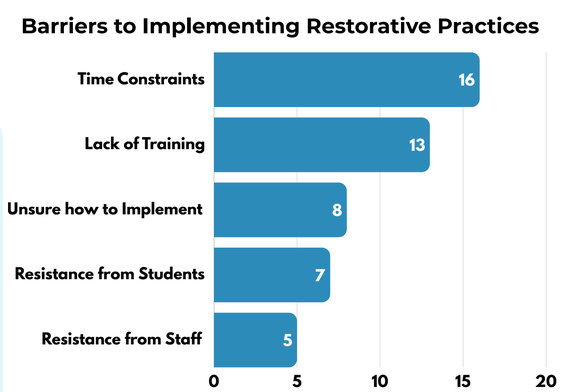

Figure 1. Barriers to implementing restorative practices reported by teachers (n = 24). Multiple responses were permitted.

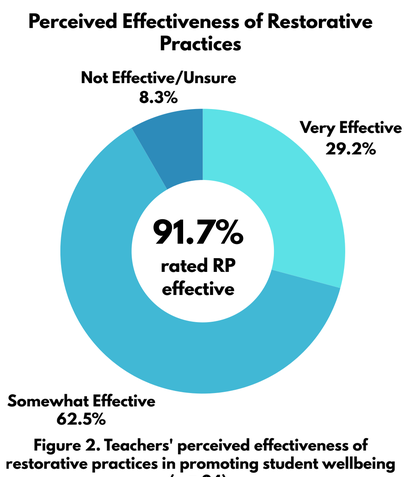

Figure 2. Teachers' perceived effectiveness of restorative practices in promoting student wellbeing (n = 24).

Results/Key Findings

Of the 24 teachers surveyed:

- 75% had received restorative practice training.
- 91.7% perceived RP as effective.
- 75% used informal restorative conversations.
- 66.7% identified time constraints as a barrier.
- 41.7% reported using restorative practices occasionally.

54.2% of teachers reported observing positive changes in student behaviour and wellbeing

Analysis & Discussion

P**ositive Teacher Perceptions:** Findings suggest that restorative practices support stronger teacher–student relationships, improved communication and more constructive approaches to behaviour management, consistent with Gregory et al. (2016).

Implementation Barriers: Despite positive perceptions, inconsistent use highlights the impact of time constraints, insufficient training and varying levels of staff engagement (Sugrue et al., 2020).

Whole-School Approach: Sustainable implementation requires leadership support, ongoing professional development and consistent engagement across the school community (McGarr, 2021).

Conclusion

Teachers generally perceived restorative practices positively, particularly in supporting student wellbeing, communication and classroom relationships. However, time constraints, limited training and inconsistent implementation remain significant barriers.

To support sustainable implementation, schools should:

- Provide ongoing professional development.
- Promote a consistent whole-school approach.
- Strengthen leadership support and staff collaboration.

Limitation: Findings reflect 24 teachers in one post-primary school and cannot be generalised nationally

Key Sources & Acknowledgements

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