Empowering Voices for Student Success

Embedding Restorative Practice and Circle Process in School Culture
Empowering Voices for Student Success: Embedding Restorative Practice and Circle Process in School Culture

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This handbook documents the initial stages of a journey taken by a group of educators and their community justice partners towards embedding restorative practices in their school culture. These first steps required the support of many people along the way:

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INTRODUCTION

VISIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

We all want success for our students. We have good intentions and realistic expectations. We know what success looks like. We want to see our students achieve their potential and find a place in a healthy community.

The following excerpt, from one of the many student engagement initiatives that the Ontario Ministry of Education put in place to support student success, stresses the importance of student voice:

**Student Voice is about you – Ontario’s students – having a voice in your learning. It’s about connecting what’s happening in the classroom to real-life experiences outside school and giving you ways to help achieve your goals. Student Voice is a way for you to shape your learning environment while building your skills and abilities. It helps you be a more active citizen and supports student democracy and empowerment.**

We want all students to be successful, and we need your energy and ideas to make this happen.

Speak up! We want to make Ontario’s publicly funded education system even better than it already is, and that starts with you! You have a voice, and we want to hear what you have to say about your education. We want to help you make your school a place where everyone feels welcome and where you are empowered to speak your mind, get involved and become active citizens and leaders.

You have said you want to...

- share your ideas with government on how to strengthen student engagement and make Ontario’s publicly funded education system even better.
- have a school culture where all students feel that they belong.
- work as partners with your teachers, and participate in school decisions that will shape your lives and the lives of your peers.

This excerpt can be found at: [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/studentsuccess/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/studentsuccess/)
Finding Common Ground (2008), the Ministry of Education’s Character Development Initiative, echoes this vision of empowered and engaged young voices:

Character must be developed through active participation and supported by dialogue, reflection and action. The Character Development Initiative is grounded in the vision of an education system in which students play a pivotal role, and are actively engaged in their own learning, in the life of the school, and in their communities.

The Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) envisions:

Adolescent Learners engaged in high performance schools that are:
- developmentally responsive,
- academically excellent, and
- socially equitable.

These visions clearly articulate the expectations and hopes for WHERE we want to be and WHAT we need to do. But HOW do we get there? HOW do we transform from what we are now to what we envision?

This is where Restorative Practices can be effectively applied.

WHAT IS STUDENT SUCCESS?

We once thought student success meant the 3Rs; being able to “Read, Write, and do Arithmetic”. We still expect our graduates to be successful with those 3R’s. And now we also know that success with those 3R’s is dependent on 3 other Rs: relationship, relevance, and rigour (Daggett, 2009).

Our definition of student success has recently evolved to include one more R: resilience. This is the ability to overcome limiting doubts and fears and to try again after learning from failure. See Hammond (2011) for more about resilience.

We gain experience and competence with the 7R’s of student success as we gain experience and competence with Restorative Practices.
THE OBJECTIVE: FOUR DIRECTIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

The Four Directions model for understanding people comes from local Haudenosaunee First Nations. In this model, people are viewed as multidimensional beings with multidimensional needs and gifts. People lead mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical lives and all four directions must be engaged and in balance for people to experience wellbeing.

This balance is important. Each direction corresponds with conditions for success that we try to create as educators. “Reading, writing, and arithmetic” are not purely mental activities, and we know that if students aren’t physically, emotionally, and spiritually well, their mental capacities are compromised. Thus, developing each of the 7 Rs is more than just a mental experience.

THE METHODOLOGY: FOUR DIRECTIONS OF RESTORATIVE CULTURES

The Four Directions of student success inform and frame Restorative Practices as well. Inspired by Aboriginal Circle Justice processes from around the world, Restorative Practices provide safe, non-threatening spaces where all voices are empowered and all voices are heard.

When we adopt a restorative approach we affirm a more holistic and therefore more realistic view of our students, our schools, and ourselves. We choose to see things from a broader context and we seek the perspectives of others.

Multidimensional models such as the Four Directions help us focus on creating optimal teaching and learning spaces: spaces where people can get in touch with their unique selves and find their place in the community.
Restorative Practices reanimate our ability to think together and to learn together because we are empowered to release ourselves from either-or paradigms.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer (2007) captures the essence of the school environment essential to helping our students to do well not just in school, but more importantly to do well in the lives they lead outside of school. As Palmer observes, truth is found not by splitting the world into either-or but by embracing it as *both-and*. In certain circumstances, truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and, if we want to know the truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one. A school that embraces an holistic approach to students, teaching, and learning brings all perspectives together to address the whole person and envelop them in a nurturing environment. For, if we want to know what is essential, we must stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again.

Palmer’s work is full of ordinary truths about teaching that can be expressed only as paradoxes. For example, intellect works in concert with feelings, so if we hope to open our students’ minds, we must open their emotions as well. Having opened those emotions, we must be prepared to deal with them and value them. Feeling safe enough to express emotions signifies that relationships and trust are being built.

Teaching and learning require a higher degree of awareness than we ordinarily possess — and awareness is always heightened when we are caught in a creative tension. Paradox is another name for that tension, a way of holding opposites together that creates an electric charge that keeps us awake.

Finally, the six paradoxical tensions that Palmer identifies are exactly those that characterize this vision of an optimal teaching and learning space:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and charged.
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honour the “little” stories of the students and the “big” stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

Restorative Practices create movement towards this optimal teaching and learning space. The practices and processes you will work with throughout this handbook are intended to maximize time and space for developmentally responsive, socially equitable, relevant, empowering, and collaborative learning and sharing opportunities.
HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook outlines the steps a group of educators and community partners in the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) are taking to implement and integrate Restorative Practices in daily classroom programming. The group includes a full spectrum of people who contribute to student success: Teachers, Learning Resource Coordinators, Child and Youth Workers, Educational Assistants, Instructional Assistants, Administrators, and Community Justice Partners.

This handbook documents their collective learning: insights, reflections, advice, examples, templates, and recommended resources. It also provides some suggested activities that can be used as a guide for getting started on a similar journey. In addition, the group relied on two excellent resources: *Circle Time for Emotional Literacy* (Roffey, 2006) and *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning* (Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel, 2010). We refer to both these resources and others throughout the handbook. All resources and references are listed in the Bibliography.

This handbook is designed to be used as a guide. It is intended for professional learning groups to adapt for their own practice. By using Circle Processes as a format, they can learn how to implement Restorative Practices in the classroom. In these professional learning collaborations, participants can actively engage with the processes and values they want to embed in their learning environments. All of the information, presented as tips, challenges, and things that work, comes from the material presented by the trainer, Catherine Wills, enhanced by the collective experience of those who attended four training workshops and five monthly regional circles. We learned together along the way and will continue to do so in the years to come.

If you choose to follow along with us, you will have a chance to self-assess, find your restorative strengths, and to make a plan to put those restorative strengths into action in a way that suits your unique vision in your school community. The process at UCDSB is ongoing so this is not a static handbook about the past. It is a living document that will continue to evolve as we continue to learn together.
Circle work is at the Heart of Restorative Practices…

Circles are as old as the hills. Human beings’ earliest discussions were held in circles around the fire. Somewhere along the way, as our numbers grew and our social organizations became more complex, we moved out of egalitarian circles into hierarchical structures. Now, often from a raised platform, leaders typically face others seated in rows, with most of the group looking at the back of the people in front of them.

Yet, in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes, we are rediscovering the power of circles. For all our technological advances, we have come to realize that we lost something along the way – a very simple and effective technology that fosters mutual understanding and healing in a way that often seems magical.

In circles we face each other and speak respectfully, one person at a time, diminishing the feeling of disconnectedness that permeates our modern world and restoring the sense of belonging that constitutes healthy human community. We may find that this ancient form of social discourse helps us address our greatest challenges.

Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2010)
CHAPTER 1: RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND CIRCLE PROCESSES

WHAT ARE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES?

Restorative Practices are any actions that create, restore or strengthen relationships and understanding between people. Restorative Practices, when paired with Circle Processes, help people talk and think together in order to understand each other, learn together, examine perspectives, and to make things “as right as possible”. We can use Restorative Practices and Circle Processes in several ways:

- to include, engage, and empower as many voices as possible in the journey towards achieving our visions
- to develop emotional literacy and collaborative inquiry competence
- to engage the voice of the child and the voice of the adolescent in his or her own learning experience
- to create an opportunity for students to find the relevance of curriculum to their own needs and interests
- to help staff, administration, and the community to collaboratively learn about, explore, and resolve issues

Restorative Practices use sets of appreciative questions and Circle Processes to create and restore balance in relationships and systems.

They create a forum for building balance in relationships and systems through inclusive, egalitarian, and democratic processes. They help people to find and use their voices and to think collectively without fear of judgement.

They aim to restore balance in relationships and systems. When misunderstandings or issues arise or when harm has been done, everyone who has a stake in the outcome can tell his or her story and can have a voice in putting things as right as possible.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND CIRCLE VALUES

Committing to circle values and working with people in circles are key Restorative Practices. Many educators and other caring adults who work with students already embrace and embody circle values in their school cultures.

In fact, our school culture is the combined expression of all of our individual and shared beliefs and values. Our beliefs and values inform and govern our interactions. The sum of all those interactions is what we call culture. If we want a restorative culture, then our interactions need to be based on restorative values.
Circles transform challenges into opportunities by applying ancient wisdom about human relationships. This wisdom begins with appreciating the role that values have in human conduct. They are our compass. The values we bring to a situation determine how we respond...

Circles seek out and nurture common ground through an interest-based consensus approach.

Barry Stuart (1997)

Those values include:

- FAIRNESS
- RESPECT
- RESPONSIBILITY
- PERSEVERANCE
- CARING
- DIGNITY
- COURAGE
- HONESTY
- GENEROSITY
- TRUST
- SHARING
- INCLUSIVITY
- EMPATHY
- RESILIENCE

Growth in experiencing, understanding and applying circle values supports growth towards success as a student and as a community member.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND CIRCLE PROCESS

HOW we learn is as important as WHAT we learn. Reading this handbook is an important, but not sufficient, process for learning about Restorative Practices; it is not the best HOW. Exploring, experiencing, and talking with others about the contents of this handbook in sharing, learning, dialogue, and issue circles is a better process. Circle Processes provide a path for HOW to best learn, implement, and integrate Restorative Practices into our culture.

Circles are non-hierarchical and democratic structures that have centres and no sides, no beginnings, or ends. They are an effective technology for sharing, learning, and collaborative inquiry. When we commit to circle values and meet, learn, and work together in circle processes, we empower everyone to interact as equals and to have a voice. We create optimal learning spaces such as Parker Palmer describes.
A CONTINUUM OF CIRCLE PROCESSES

By starting with Sharing Circles, the most simple Circle Process, and moving through Dialogue to Justice Circles, we build competence in the 7 R’s and experience growth in the circle of human values:

**Sharing Circles**
provide a forum for learning about circles while building emotional literacy, relationship competence, and comfort with speaking and listening to each other.

**Justice Circles**
provide the opportunity, when harms have been done, for people to take responsibility, express their interests and needs, and restore relationships, dignity, and respect for all those affected.

**Learning Circles**
provide opportunities for rigorous and relevant learning as well as a space to apply and practice higher order critical thinking skills.

**Dialogue Circles**
allow us to explore our perceptions and those of others in order to build knowledge, understanding, and the conditions for collective growth.

**Issue Circles**
provide a means to collaboratively solve problems, address challenges, and prevent conflicts from becoming harms or illegal issues.

**Call on community justice partners for assistance**

**Start with simple sharing circles**

**Move on to learning, dialogue, and issue circles**
While experience with one circle process builds comfort and competence with any of the other types of circles, there is a natural progression. Sharing Circles are non-issued based and easy going. In contrast, Restorative Justice Circles require us to make things as right as possible in a more formal and structured process. It makes sense that the more experience we have with Sharing and Learning circles, the better prepared we are to contribute meaningfully to Dialogue, Issue, and Justice Circles.

This group of educators chose this path in order to cultivate a Restorative culture of solutions, rather than suspensions. They wondered if empowering voices by embedding Sharing, Learning, Dialogue, and Issue circles in school culture, could reduce the frequency of suspensions at school. Administrators and Community Justice Partners wondered if it would reduce the need for Restorative Justice Circles in the community.

Restorative Practices span a continuum of options for intervention, from informal to more formal and structured approaches:

- Affective Statements
- Restorative Questions
- Impromptu Circles
- Dialogue or Issue Circles
- Justice Circles

(adapted from Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel, 2010)

In the following pages you will see how people are integrating Restorative Practices and Circle Processes in our school communities in order to engage and empower more voices in creating conditions for student success. We will follow their path as we explore the purposes, stages, roles, and applications of Sharing, Learning, Dialogue, Issue, and Restorative Justice Circles. Suggested exercises, activities, and stories are included to help guide your learning.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO INTRODUCE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND CIRCLE PROCESSES

1. Talking Pieces

Pick a talking piece; any reasonably sized object that you like and means something to you. Ask the group to form themselves into a circle and tell them briefly about your talking piece. Pass it around, either clockwise or counter clockwise, for them to look at.

Explain the basic guidelines for circles. Describe the right to pass and the function of the talking piece. Pass it around until everyone has a chance to answer the following questions:

- Have you ever sat in circles before?
- What was that like?
- What object would you choose as a talking piece? Why?
- What is it like to only be able to talk when you have the talking piece?
- What ideas do you have for a talking piece for your group?

2. What Do We Know?

In a circle, discuss the following questions. Each person in the circle should have an opportunity to speak, if they choose to do so, as many times as they wish. A recorder should document the responses as a means of providing data to track the learning journey.

- What do you know about Restorative Practices or Restorative Justice?
- What have you heard?
- What is it or what is it not?
- What is being restored?
- What benefits do you see?

3. Simple Shapes: Forming a Centre with No Sides

You will need a stopwatch and enough space for your group to move around. Time your group while they form themselves into each of these shapes: 1) a perfect square, 2) an equilateral triangle, and 3) a perfect circle. They can touch each other on the hand or arm and they may make gestures, but they may not speak or make any noises at all. Post their times after each shape. Remind them that:

- squares have 4 equal sides and the corners are 90 degree angles.
- equilateral triangles have 3 equal sides. Ask about different kinds of triangles.

Most groups will find circles fastest and easiest. Form a circle and invite observations about how they went about forming each shape. Did leaders emerge? Why was the circle the simplest and fastest shape to make? Consider posting their answers.
CHAPTER 2: SHARING CIRCLES

Purpose:
- Learning about Circle Process
- Practicing circle routines
- Building respectful relationships
- Modeling pro-social behaviours
- Expanding self-knowledge

WHAT ARE SHARING CIRCLES?

Sharing Circles provide a simple forum to introduce Circle Process and to learn circle format, procedures, and the roles of participants. There are very simple guidelines common to all types of circles:

1) We listen to others when it is their turn to talk
2) We all have the chance to talk
3) We all have the ability to pass
4) There is no pressure to talk
5) We talk to each other with dignity and respect

Sharing Circles are short, simple, and positively focused storytelling spaces. Whether learning names, setting agendas, getting ready for class trips, or discussing current events, Sharing Circles empower students to practise finding and using their voices. Students develop speaking and listening competence through telling stories, asking questions, and giving reflections on the topic of the day. Together, we can explore a wide range of topics related to emotional literacy and develop a vocabulary to describe ourselves, our thoughts, and feelings. In this non-threatening process, we can build emotional intelligence and respectful, tolerant relationship skills.

Appreciative Questions
Inquire into:
- Strengths, capacities, abilities, talents.
- Conditions for success past and present.
- A system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.
- Peoples’ many untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive.
  David Cooperrider (1997)

In Sharing Circles we pose appreciative, non-issued based questions such as “What makes for a great learning experience?”, or “What makes a trusted friend?”, or “How are the Circle Values alive in our classroom?” We are not trying to solve all the problems of the world. We are trying to learn to articulate and listen to feelings and needs.
Important Routines and Rituals

- Sit in a circle.
- Avoid barriers between people.
- Use a talking piece to let people know when it is their turn to talk.
- Listen fully to the person with the talking piece.
- Respect the right to pass.

The Sharing Circle model establishes important routines and rituals. When we sit in circles with no barriers between us we can see everyone. When we use a talking piece and agree that we only speak when we have it, we create the conditions to listen fully to others. When we have the right to pass, we are relieved of the stress of the necessity to speak until we are ready. Most importantly, we create the conditions to reflect on and learn from the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of others.

SHARING CIRCLE PROCESS: PURPOSES AND STAGES

Circle Time for Emotional Literacy (Roffey 2006) is a terrific guide and resource for learning about and leading Sharing Circles. This is a themed collection of age appropriate experiential games and activities for short (1/2 to 1 hour) Sharing Circles. It provides a structured framework for people to interact and develop:

- a focus on the positive and a model for positive interactions
- knowledge and understanding of others
- a sense of belonging and connectedness
- self-awareness
- increased emotional resources and wellbeing

Each sharing circle has four stages designed to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to become competent and comfortable in the circle environment:

1) an opening reading, reflection, or activity;
2) a community building component;
3) a sharing component; and
4) a closing.

1. Opening
   - Intro Activity
2. Community Building
   - Check in Mix-up Activities
3. Sharing
   - Whole Group Activities
   - Small Group Activities
4. Closing
   - Calming Activity

The Sharing Circle model establishes important routines and rituals. When we sit in circles with no barriers between us we can see everyone. When we use a talking piece and agree that we only speak when we have it, we create the conditions to listen fully to others. When we have the right to pass, we are relieved of the stress of the necessity to speak until we are ready. Most importantly, we create the conditions to reflect on and learn from the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of others.
Restorative and Appreciative Circle Starters That Work

General questions about preference:
- What activities do you enjoy doing outside of school?
- What things are important to you?
- What are some favourite colours, foods, sports, games, etc.?
- What is good about our class/ the program?
- What would you rather be doing right now?
- What kind(s) of music help you relax?
- What is your “Brag or Drag” today?
- What was the best part of today?
- What makes you happy these days?
- What helps when you’re sad?

Indirect questions about feelings:
- What would someone your age think about / feel about _____?
- What images calm you? (Closing eyes may make students feel less vulnerable)

Questions about interpersonal relationships:
- What is one nice thing that someone has done for you?
- What is one nice thing you’ve done for someone else?
- What does it mean to be a good friend?

SHARING CIRCLE STAGES: PURPOSES AND ACTIVITIES

The progressively interactive stages of Sharing Circles are designed to make it safe and easy for people to listen and share in groups. Below is an outline of each stage with suggested activities. See Roffey (2006) for more activity options.

STAGE 1: OPENING

The purpose is to:
- Set the tone
- Establish comfort and flow of open communications
- Start the building of relationships among participants
- Explain guidelines and expectations
- Establish the right to pass
- Frame the discussion
- Introduce or invite the topic
- Alleviate the fear of the unknown

Sample Opening Questions and Activities:
- A reading by the keeper or a shared reading of a passage or poem related to the intent of the circle
- Introduce yourself
- Give one word to describe how you are doing today
- Describe your talking symbol. Why did you choose it?
- What topics interest you?
A boy who rarely participated in any activity in class was the first one to put a mark on the blank class talking stick - his hand print

Teacher/Circle Keeper

STAGE 2: COMMUNITY BUILDING

The purpose is to:

- Be fun and non-threatening
- Increase the comfort level
- Practise routines and norms
- Improve communication
- Practise listening
- Identify assumptions and perceptions
- Build trust, respect, acceptance, empathy, and inclusivity
- Provide opportunities for dialogue

Movement, mixing, and expanding one's circle of relationships is a big part of the community building component. Silent Statements, Pair Sharing, and Pair Interviews are appropriate at every stage and are safe structures for those beginning to find their voices. Moving from working in pairs to working in groups to sharing in the large group incrementally increases networks of interactions and comfort with group size.

Sample Community Building Activities:

- Ice breakers and name games
- Silent Statements (e.g. Silently change places if you have ever…)
- Mix-up activities using cards, coloured pompoms, etc., to group people
- Pair share or pair interview about important people and places
- Planning a field trip in small groups
- Taking turns reading a story
- Creating a group work of art

STAGE 3: SHARING

The purpose is to:

- Get to know each other better
- Offer each participant an opportunity to speak and be heard
- Practice and develop dialogue skills
- Increase comfort level and further build trust
- Learn from others’ experiences
- Participate in collaborative learning

Circles are less about telling students what to do than providing a framework in which they take responsibility… giving students agency also helps to change [from] an ‘external locus of control’, where a person believes that everything just happens to them to an ‘internal locus of control’, which is a belief that a person’s own actions and efforts can affect changes.

Sue Roffey (2006)
Sample Sharing Activities:

- Pair Share about the topic of the day. What do you know about it? What puzzles you? What do you wonder about?
- Interview each other about a specific topic then summarize your partner’s response
- Relate a personal experience – tell a story about a time you learned something about __________
- What makes you happy?
- Using a beach ball or large set of dice with questions on the sides – people can choose which question they want to answer
- Use a question box. Each person may contribute a question for the circle

STAGE 4: CLOSING

The purpose is to:

- Debrief, summarize, and reflect on the themes of the circle
- Build a bridge to the next circle
- Get feedback to provide for improvement in following circles
- Thank people for participating
- End on a calm and positive note

Sample Closing Activities:

- Developing questions for the next circle
- Building a collective summary:
  - What will you take away?
  - What did you learn?
  - What do you remember most?
- Reading of a quote, poem, or meditation
- Singing or listening to a song
- Reviewing and rating of the circle
- Recording in personal circle journals
- Combining one word descriptors and silence

See Roffey (2006) for more activity options and themed Sharing Circle designs that are relevant to all school age developmental stages.
Advice from Your Peers

- Start with easy questions in relaxed, non-issue based, circles to build confidence in the process.
- Avoid naming “a” favourite; we want to value many things not just one thing.
- Each time the talking piece moves, we gain a broader vantage point because we listen to another perspective.
- Pay attention to how the quality of talk and participation changes with each round of the circle.
- Circle work is like weaving a basket! When we first learn to weave a basket, there are holes and gaps and we don’t ask it to hold too much. As we weave more and weave with others, the basket can become very strong and hold many more challenging and valuable “objects”.

Responsibilities and Roles for Circle Keepers and Co-Keepers

All Circle Processes have both a circle keeper and a co-keeper who act as facilitators and are positioned on opposite sides of the circle. The keeper starts and ends the circle and manages the questions. The co-keeper helps maintain the flow and the focus, and assists the keeper as needed. Eye contact and body language play a large part in the communication between these two. Collaborating before the circle ensures clarity on purpose and direction. De-briefing after each circle ensures that any shared learning is applied to future circles.

There are many important responsibilities and roles for keepers and co-keepers. In this chapter, we explore some that are related to all types of circle keeping.

Establishing Routines and Rituals creates a sense of safety and familiarity. Students know what to expect and can clarify the expectations. Using the ritual of the talking piece combined with the circle values brings a sense of respect for the process and ensures that every voice is heard.

The Keeper’s Role:

- Be consistent
- Maintain the invitational nature of circle work and the right to pass
- Keep time and avoid anyone dominating the circle
- Orient new members
- Assign a role to those who don’t want to talk (be my observer / help me take notes)
- Provide opportunities for others to co-keep and become keepers over time
**Explaining Values and Guidelines** establishes the boundaries of the circle and provides a point of reference for appropriate behaviour. It is important that the values and guidelines can be clearly understood, observed, and experienced by all participants.

The Keeper’s Role:
- Outline the values and guidelines
- Ensure everyone understands them and respects them at all times
- Support students as they practise applying the values in the circle process
- Model and build respect for different values
- Ensure no one is judged
- Ensure everyone has a voice
- Respect those who do not buy in

Providing for Inclusion and Choice is critical if all people in the circle are to feel heard and respected. We must challenge ourselves to be purposely inclusive thereby creating a sense of belonging and space for all. Choice itself is empowering because it creates a sense of ownership and pride and draws on the strengths, interests, and readiness of each individual.

The Keeper’s Role:
- Ask open ended questions
- Model genuine interest
- Encourage participation
- Honour the right to pass
- Make use of non-verbal communication skills
- Model listening skills
- Send the talking piece around until all decline the opportunity to speak

**Sample Values and Guidelines**
- Speak honestly, openly, and with kindness.
- Be respectful.
- One person speaks at a time.
- The option to pass is available; you will have another opportunity to speak.
- Confidentiality must be respected.

It is possible to speak honestly, but without kindness; conversely, one can speak with kindness but totally dishonestly. Thus both kindness and honesty must be present in the circle at all times.

Circle Keeper

**In Circles, like in life, a pass is not a fail!**
I used to think that I had to control everything in the classroom, have the right plan, and all the right answers…

…Now I realize I need to focus on asking the right questions.

Learning Resource Teacher/ Circle Keeper

Framing and Asking Questions sets the tone and brings the circle together. Appreciative questions enquire into experiences, capacities, hopes, and strengths present in the group. Asking questions that empower people to tell their truths helps keeps the tone positive. Listening to all responses is critical. Listening helps the keeper generate meaningful questions which are framed to encourage development of, and opportunities to practise with, higher order critical thinking skills.

The Keeper’s Role:

- Describe the critical role of listening
- Ensure questions lead to respectful discussions:
  - frame appreciative questions to diffuse anxiety and tension;
  - frame the questions in positive, non-confrontational terms; and
  - understand different levels of questioning and the importance of progressing from light hearted to deeper thinking questions.
- Manage the pace at which the questions are building
- Rephrase and repeat the questions as necessary
- Remember to act as a facilitator whose role is to listen and guide, not “lead”
Reflections on the Importance of the Talking Piece

- Passing the talking piece to everyone in a methodical way ensures that the quiet ones have ample opportunity to voice their view.
- Getting accustomed to using a talking piece is a challenge for some.
- Don't stop at one go around; quiet ones may speak the second, third or fourth time around and the depth of contributions and insights increases.
- Students who rarely speak up in class or participate in anything may feel empowered to talk with a talking piece.
- Reflection is a key component that occurs because one has to wait until the talking piece comes around.
- Listening to others often alters the input one ultimately makes.
- Simply holding the talking piece allows people to participate in silence if they choose to do so.

Managing the Talking Piece ensures that only one person speaks at a time. The effect is to slow the process by allowing time for participants to focus, think about the question, and respond without pressure.

Slowing down means taking the time to make discoveries. Take a moment now to contemplate the picture of the talking piece to the right.

The practice of moving the talking piece methodically around the circle in one direction offers each person the opportunity to speak or to pass. The ability to pass ensures that no one feels pressured to speak.

Sending the talking piece around many times allows time for people to build on the ideas of others and for those who have previously passed to add their voice when they feel comfortable. This has a tendency to create a calming effect on the whole group.

**The Keeper’s Role:**

- Ensure everyone understands the role of the talking piece
- Assist in the appropriate selection of the talking piece
- Ensure that the speaker has the talking piece
- Invite participants to bring and introduce their own talking pieces
Monitoring and Evaluating the Effect on Circle Participants helps the keeper know when it is necessary to redirect the discussion, adjust the questions, or intervene to maintain the positive flow.

The Keeper’s Role:

- Encourage participation
- Observe body language
- Listen for the “real” issue
- Provide each participant with a journal or circle time folder to track individual progress
- Invite students to evaluate the circle process periodically
- Invite students to self-assess progress based on their own success criteria
- Monitor for success indicators

Modeling Compassion and Empathy teaches students by both precept and example how to demonstrate the caring that promotes open and honest sharing and engages us in deeper communication. This allows for the removal of “masks” and promotes the opening of minds.

The Keeper’s Role:

- Be aware of the physical environment: comfort, privacy, auditory / visual needs, and inclusivity
- Allow silence and time for internal processing
- Intervene respectfully as needed
- Model healthy and safe self-disclosure – telling a little personal story helps others to tell their own stories
- Use “open” non-verbal communication and body language

Observed Success Indicators

In the circle:

- Mood calm & peaceful
- Defenses lowered
- Hoodies lowered
- Students want to repeat the process
- Full participation may look like silent journaling for those who need to talk little
- Quiet students speak out
- Positive interactions between students
- Students support and respect each other
- Active listening
- Increased self-discipline and control
- Smiles

In the classroom:

- Students take initiative
- Participation increased
- Increased engagement in learning
- Calmer environment
- Fewer behaviour incidents
- Fewer suspensions

WE SHARE WHEN OTHERS CARE
Tips for Getting Started

- Practice as a staff together, modeling circle process and values as you learn how to implement it.
- Work with a partner or a mentor who has some experience.
- Call circles in inviting places in the school building, like the kitchen, the common room, the boardroom, and outdoors.
- Present it as an option; select or invite students to participate then ask them to invite one friend to get more people coming - small steps.
- Start in small groups with small issues that might escalate if not addressed.
- Have a circle about what students want to talk about in circles.
- Have a staff circle about what staff want to talk about in circles.
- Start each day or week with a circle to prepare for the day/week; use it as a means for closing the day/week.
- Make a talking piece together as a group; each person adds their mark or symbol on it and new people can be added as they join the circle.
- Invite people to bring a favourite object to put in the centre of the circle; do one round of the talking piece in which each person gets their object and tells why they chose that particular item.
- Generate group definitions of each of the circle values in a circle discussion and post them for future reference.
- Put the Circle Values in the centre of the circle so that they are visible to everyone and can be consulted as needed.

Add to the list: What is your best advice for getting started?
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO PRACTISE SHARING CIRCLES

1. Practising Circle Keeping and Circle Process

With a group of at least 6 staff people, form a circle. Choose a keeper and a co-keeper. Select one of the Sharing Circle Plans from the following pages:
- Seeing the Positives on (Page 24), or
- Being Part of a Group (Page 25)

Following the plan, conduct the circle. Select your own opening or closing readings. Next, try the same process with a circle of at least 6 students.

2. Circle Time for Emotional Literacy Sharing Circle

Read Chapter Two of Circle Time for Emotional Literacy (Roffey, 2006). Conduct a Sharing Circle around the themes of:
- What resonated with you? What do you think you will try?
- What do you find challenging?
- Why are games and experiential activities so important?
- What other activities have you used or heard of others using?

3. Designing Circle Time

Using the Sharing Circle Design Template (page 26) design a ½ - ¾ hour long Sharing Circle with all four components. You may want to refer to Roffey (2006) for more activity ideas. Use the questions below as the basis for the sharing done throughout the stages of the circle.
- What could be shared in sharing circles?
- What are your favourite community building activities?
- What values or character qualities would you like to discuss in your classrooms?
- What are the conditions for empowering voices and developing respectful relations in your classroom?
- What strategies could be used to develop the emotional literacy that students need to sustain their cognitive lives?
Sharing Circle Design: Seeing the Positives

1. Opening
   - Before the Circle: Invite people to bring their own talking piece;
   - Open with a short reading about circles (e.g. see page 6);
   - Take turns introducing personal talking pieces;
   - Talk about turn-taking, pass, respect, and circle values;
   - Pass the talking piece: What is one thing you like about the school? Give a positive adjective with your name and something for which you are thankful.

2. Community Building
   - Mix Up: Match pipe cleaner colours;
   - Pair Share: Name one thing you like about your partner and present it to the group;
   - Pair Interview Option: What is one thing you like about yourself?

3. Sharing
   - Form Small Circles: Share positives discussed in pairs;
   - Record positives on post-it notes or a flipchart under the heading “Our Collective Strengths” as a permanent summary and record;
   - Optional: What are the positive aspects of school? What works for you?

4. Closing
   - Reconvene the Whole Circle;
   - Pass the talking piece: How will we ensure that we focus on the positives as a class, school, or community?
   - Pass the Talking Piece: What other topics would you like to explore in Sharing Circles?
   - Give positive reinforcement to the group and acknowledge their work;
   - Close with a reading, song, or meditation.
Sharing Circle Design: Being Part of a Group

1. Opening
   - Invite people to move desks and form a circle;
   - Explain the function of talking pieces and the process;
   - Introduce the topic and ask for examples of groups (families, friends, teams, clubs, etc.);
   - Pair Sharing: What groups have you enjoyed being part of?
   - Share your partner’s response with the Whole Circle.

2. Community Building
   - Mix up Activity to form Small Circles: Match coloured pom-poms;
   - Pass the Talking Piece: What are some good things about being part of a group? What do you like about being in this group, class, or school?

3. Sharing
   - Reconvene the Whole Circle and pass the talking piece: What are your reflections on groups? What is something you remember or want to share from your Small Circle?

4. Closing
   - Pass the talking piece: What is one thing that you will do to make the most of being part of a group?
   - Close with a reading, silence, or a song (e.g. "Row, row, row your boat" or another song that can be sung in a round).

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- Share your partner’s response with the Whole Circle.
- Close with a reading, silence, or a song (e.g. "Row, row, row your boat" or another song that can be sung in a round).
Sharing Circle Design Template

Today we are sharing our ideas and experience about _________________
CHAPTER 3: LEARNING CIRCLES

Purpose:
- Applying Circle Process to classroom curriculum
- Empowering the student voice to create conditions for rigorous and relevant individual learning
- Experiencing collective learning
- Applying and practising higher order critical thinking skills

WHAT IS A LEARNING CIRCLE?

How can we adapt Circle Process to enhance curriculum delivery and learning in the classroom?

The routines and relationships established in the practice of Sharing Circles can be adapted as a rigorous framework for Learning Circles. In Sharing Circles, students develop comfort and competence with using their voices and their listening skills to identify, express, and hear feelings, needs, and interests. Learning Circles explore how the feelings, needs, and interests of the students relate to curriculum expectations.

Learning Circles are democratic and egalitarian spaces of inquiry where students come together as researching partners with teachers to explore curriculum. In Learning Circles, students are encouraged to share what they know, how they came to know it, and what they want to learn. Together, they build the conditions that best support their learning.

LEARNING CIRCLE PROCESS

Learning Circles follow the same phases and format as Sharing Circles:
- an opening orientation to the topic,
- building a learning community by exploring relevance to interests,
- researching and sharing information, and
- closing with consolidating and collectivizing knowledge.

Incremental interaction patterns and a combination of individual, paired and group activities keep it interesting and support the inclusion of many voices in a short time frame. The format is not static, however, and the stages should be modified to suit the learning focus.

I noticed whenever learning involved either: 1) creativity from the individual, 2) personal choice by the student in determining a project or 3) controversy around an issue applicable to the personal world, learning invariably occurred, lasted, and something intangible flourished for us all.

Carl Rogers (1984)
Facilitating Learning Circles

1. Ask the 5 QUESTIONS.
2. Record responses and help the students identify research themes (compare with curriculum expectations and identify missing research themes if needed).
3. Help the students form their own research questions and select their own research responsibilities.
4. Ensure relevant and accessible resources are available.
5. Reconvene students to share information in pair or small group summaries.
6. Help the students document, consolidate, and build knowledge.
7. Post group memory and key learnings for all to see.

Five simple questions can bring insight into the interests and passions of students while engaging them in designing, modifying, and improving their own learning experience:

1. What are you curious about?
2. What issues concern you?
3. What things puzzle you?
4. What problems do you wish you could solve?
5. What knowledge or experiences do you have to share?

We can pose these questions: 1) in order to build an agenda for learning from scratch, or 2) in relation to specific curriculum expectations.

These questions position us as partners researching with our students. We are striving to co-construct knowledge and understanding with engaged and empowered students. This necessitates a mindset that facilitates engagement and empowerment through collaborative inquiry. As students share their concerns, curiosities, relevant experiences, and knowledge sources in circle process, the role of the teacher is to guide the process and to capture the information.

Students can then break into research pairs or small research groups randomly, based on interests, or by other agreed upon criteria. In this stage, they search for answers using technology and resources provided in the classroom or beyond.

Reconvened in the bigger circle, students have the opportunity to share their discoveries and then consolidate their collective understanding. No one is left to do all the research on their own and no one is responsible for “delivering” knowledge. Rather, there is a collective cognitive responsibility for thinking and learning together for the purpose of co-constructing meaningful knowledge.

I use circles regularly during lessons... to strengthen memory and understanding and to review academic concepts

Marie-Isabelle Pautz (2009)
Mathematician Uri Treisman was puzzled about why college students of Black and Hispanic backgrounds rarely received high grades in calculus courses, while students of Chinese and Jewish backgrounds did very well. Each year, 600,000 first-year students in that system take calculus and 250,000 fail.

Treisman and his colleagues compared a group of Black students with a group of Chinese students. In an imaginative methodological move, Treisman asked students’ permission to videotape them as they studied calculus in their dorm rooms. By doing so, he solved the mystery.

It turned out that Black students spent the recommended eight hours a week studying calculus, alone. Chinese students worked within a similar range of hours each week, but for four to six of those hours, they worked in groups. They pooled their strengths and helped each other.

When Black and Hispanic students studied in cooperative learning groups, their grades were at the same high level or higher than those of their Chinese and Jewish peers. When students share what they understand, what is defined under the adversary paradigm as “cheating” turns out to enhance learning.

Gordon Fellman (1998)
You see, society consists of a lot of people who are interrelated... by learning, by information exchange. You can say that is crucial, without the exchange of information (learning) the society would collapse.

David Bohm (1996)

This is the magic. The sciences and the social sciences support the idea that we are hard-wired to think together. We know that we each only see a piece of the puzzle. We know that together, we have a better idea of the whole picture. We know that we learn more and we learn better when we think together.

Our students have a better chance of achieving success when we acknowledge their academic, emotional, physical, and spiritual interests. Learning Circles accommodate these interests by engaging students and teachers in all four of these directions.

Learning Circle process focusses on creating the conditions for student success:

- a process and a structure for interaction (physical),
- support and connection within a learning community (emotional),
- opportunities for empowerment and self-expression in the learning process (spiritual), and
- intellectual and cognitive challenge (mental).

The Learning Circle model promotes the voice of the student in his or her own learning experience and addresses the need for democracy in the classroom. Learning Circles not only support the interests of each unique individual, but also build community awareness and collective capacity to learn more together.

Without a respect for the thinking process, the process of building knowledge is lost.

In learning circles, each participant is encouraged to share their thinking, their knowledge structuring with the group.

Margaret Riel (2013)
ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES FOR KEEPERS AND CO-KEEPERS OF LEARNING CIRCLES

Summarizing and Recording is a crucial step. Summarizing functions as a reminder of previous conversations and helps maintain the focus of the current discussion. Records of group learning help track individual and group progress and articulate classroom and curriculum goals or expectations. Summarizing and record keeping can empower students’ creative capacities by providing access to a repository of common and readily available knowledge.

The Keeper's Role:

- Record everyone’s input
- Engage students in recording their own circle time learning
  - Use people’s actual words & check back for accuracy
  - Help them clarify their input
  - Give them recording tasks
  - Get creative with the record – photos, drawings, collages, group-created tests, songs. The more easily created on the spot, the better.
- Feed the record back to the circle for reflection
- Record the progress towards curriculum expectations, questions generated, and key learnings

Learning is optimized when students are involved in activities that require both complex thinking [rigour] as well as application of knowledge to real-world situations [relevance]. ... educators are encouraged to employ strategies that engage students, treat them as active learners ..., and make school a place where students work and teachers observe, not the other way around.

Daggett & Nussbaum (2009)
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTISING LEARNING CIRCLES

1. **Learning Circle Readiness Self-Assessment** (for groups of 6 - 20)

   - Pass the talking piece: What is one thing you have learned about guiding Learning Circles?
   - Pass the talking piece: What is your best advice for answering one of the **Self-Assessment Questions** below?
   - Close with a stretch and a reading, song, silence, or meditation.
   - Small Circles: 1) Report on Pair Interviews; 2) How do Learning Circles support Parker’s vision of Optimal Learning Spaces?
   - Reconvene the Whole Circle: 1) Report on insights from Small Circles; 2) Pass the talking piece: How can we best identify and engage student interests, goals and passions?

   4. **Consolidating**

   - Check In: What's new?
   - Pass the talking piece: What is one way to find out about students' interests and passions?
   - Read Aloud Together: Parker Palmer’s Optimal Learning Spaces (page 33) - take turns reading or ask for volunteers;
   - Form Small Circles: What are your reflections on the reading?

   3. **Exchanging Information**

   - Mix Up Activity: Match Circle Keeping Responsibilities (page 34);
   - Pair Interviews: What was your most significant learning experience as a youth? What were the conditions?
   - Look at your matched Responsibility: How does it support significant learning?

   2. **Building a Learning Community**

   - **Learning Circle Readiness Self-Assessment Questions**

     - How do I engage and preserve curiosity and the spirit of inquiry?
     - How do I show each person, class, and subject respect?
     - How do I reveal my uncertainties and help others articulate theirs?
     - How do I recognize that my students may know more than I do in some areas?
     - How can I imaginatively provide resources for learning?
     - How do I nurture creative ideas in my students?
In *The Courage to Teach* (2007), Palmer captures the essence of the school environment essential to helping our students to do well not just in school, but more importantly to do well in the lives they lead outside of school. As Palmer observes, truth is found not by splitting the world into either-or's but by embracing it as both-and. In certain circumstances, truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and, if we want to know the truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one. A school that embraces an holistic approach to students, teaching and learning brings all perspectives together to address the whole person and envelop them in a nurturing environment. For, if we want to know what is essential, we must stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again.

Palmer’s work is full of ordinary truths about teaching that can be expressed only as paradoxes. For example, intellect works in concert with feelings, so if we hope to open our students’ minds, we must open their emotions as well. Having opened those emotions, we must be prepared to deal with them and value them. They are gifts that signify that relationships and trust are being built.

Teaching and learning require a higher degree of awareness than we ordinarily possess — and awareness is always heightened when we are caught in a creative tension. Paradox is another name for that tension, a way of holding opposites together that creates an electric charge that keeps us awake.

Finally, the six paradoxical tensions that Palmer identifies are exactly those that characterize this vision of an optimal teaching and learning space:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and charged.
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honour the “little” stories of the students and the “big” stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

**Questions to consider for your reflections:**
- What about this reading puzzles you?
- What issues in the reading concern you?
- What are you most curious about when it comes to creating learning spaces?
- Which paradoxical tension do you wish to work on most?
Matching Circle Keeping Responsibilities and Descriptions

Divide the group in two. Give the Responsibilities (in bold type) to each person in one group and the explanations to the other. Match them up to find your partner.

Modeling Compassion and Empathy ... teaches students by both precept and example how to demonstrate the caring that promotes open and honest sharing and engages us in deeper communication.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Effect on Circle Participants ... helps the keeper know when it is necessary to redirect the discussion, adjust the questions, or intervene to maintain the positive flow.

Managing the Talking Piece ... ensures that only one person speaks at a time. The effect is to slow the process by allowing time for participants to focus, think about the question and respond without pressure. The practice of moving the talking piece methodically around the circle in one direction offers each person the opportunity to speak or to pass.

Explaining Values and Guidelines ... upholds the boundaries of the circle and provides a point of reference for appropriate behaviour. It is important that the values and guidelines can be clearly understood, observed, and experienced by all participants.

Establishing Routines and Rituals ... creates a sense of safety and familiarity. Students know what to expect and understand the expectations. Using the ritual of the talking piece combined with the circle values brings a sense of respect for the process and ensures that every voice is heard.

Providing for Inclusion and Choice ... is critical if all people in the circle are to feel heard and respected. We must challenge ourselves to be purposely inclusive thereby creating a sense of belonging and space for all. Choice itself is empowering because it creates a sense of ownership and pride and draws on the strengths, interests, and readiness of each individual.

Framing and Asking Questions ... sets the tone and brings the circle together. Appreciative questions inquire into experiences, capacities, hopes, and strengths present in the group.

Summarizing and Recording ... functions as a reminder of previous conversations and helps maintain the focus of the current discussion. Records of group learning help track individual and group progress and articulate classroom and curriculum goals and expectations. Summarizing and record keeping can empower students' creative capacities.
2. Designing Circle Time

- Form a staff Circle and Check In: How are you doing today?
- Open with the reading below; take turns so that all have an opportunity to read.
- Pair Share: What do you notice about the role of the teacher in this activity?
- Pair Interviews: What curriculum topic do you plan to work on in the next two weeks? What is your most difficult challenge related to the delivery of this topic? How can Learning Circle Process address this challenge?
- Small Circles: 1) Report on Pair Interviews; 2) Select one curriculum item per group (devise an ingenious way to select the topic!); 3) Use the Learning Circle Design Template on page 36 to design a learning circle.
- Reconvene Whole Circle: 1) Group reports on Learning Circle Designs; 2) Pass the talking piece: How will you implement Learning Circles and the conditions for Collective Knowledge Building in your classroom or school community?

Reading: Learning Circles in Alternative Education

I find that the more respect and knowledge the students have for one another, the smoother and better functioning my class becomes. In one class I have students who are part-time mixed with students who are full-time special-education students. With this rather large and diverse group I find that a circle and group work helps unite this class.

A lesson that has gone well uses Circle process and involves reading the local newspaper together. Each student has a newspaper, and after reading an article of his or her choosing, each student “reports out” on the article. The other students are required to listen and not interrupt. When the “reporter” is finished, he or she will ask if anyone has any questions. The reporter is the facilitator of this activity. As the teacher, I rarely have to shut down a conversation, because each student generally wants his or her turn to report out. However, I do use a timer if needed … so each student feels the activity has been fair … I also use an object [talking piece] to show which student has the floor. I have dragons, dinosaurs, cars and various other things to use.

My students are quite comfortable with each other at this time, and there is very little shyness with the “reporting out.” … I need for my students to show me what they know. My students also like being able to show their classmates what they know. This is a strategy that seems to work all the way around.

Teacher quoted in Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2010)
Today we are Learning About: _____________________________

- Consolidating Activities
- Orienting Activities
- Exchanging Information
- Building the Learning Community
3. Conduct a Learning Circle with Students

Below are several Learning Circle topics already used by staff at UCDSB. The relevant questions they asked in each circle are included. Select one or choose your own topic and questions. Conduct a Learning Circle with students.

**Learning Circles on Documentaries:**

**Shark Waters**
- What opinions were given in the documentary?
- Why were they expressed?
- What is your opinion?

Students use the information shared in the circle to write their own opinion pieces.

**Supersize Me**
- What were Morgan’s physical and emotional changes during his 30 day experiment?
- What thoughts does this documentary bring to your mind?
- What will you change in your life?

**Learning Circles and Science:**

**The Solar System**
- What do we know about the solar system?
- What would we like to know more about?
- How will we find out?
- (After watching a virtual tour of the universe) What theories are there about the origins of the universe?

As a group, the students ask and complete the questions for this assignment together.

**Making Flubber:**
- How will we find flubber recipes?
- What steps do we need to follow to make flubber?

Pairs of students complete instructions then group meets to compare results.

- What changes could we make to the directions to improve the product?
- What “recipe” produces the best flubber?

**Determining the pH of Household Substances**

Review the step by step directions for this activity here:
- What steps need to be done to complete this experiment?
- What precautions do we need to take?

Small groups test each of the substances with red cabbage extract.
- Where does each of the substances tested belong on the pH chart?
- What does this chart tell us about these substances?

Each student completes a personal chart for their records.

**Learning Circles on Current Events that Engage Student Passions:**

- What does someone your age think or feel when something like the event we are talking about today happens?
- What is and is not in our control?
- What can I do to make the world, my neighbourhood, my home, or my school a better place?
CHAPTER 4: DIALOGUE CIRCLES

Purpose:
- Applying Learning Circle process to deepen collaborative inquiry
- Enhancing professional development
- Exploring and creating clarity around perspectives
- Experiencing collective thinking and knowledge building dialogue

WHAT IS A DIALOGUE CIRCLE?

As you begin to listen, you can also begin to notice what you are thinking. Focus your thoughts on someone you care about for a moment. Almost immediately, you may find that you are flooded with thoughts and images of that person. You may also experience a range of feelings. Your memory plays a very powerful force in how you perceive those around you. To listen is to realize that much of our reaction to others comes from memory...

...“Be aware of thought” was a piece of advice Krishnamurti often offered. He would ask someone, “why do you walk that way?” and they might respond, “Because I do.” He would retort, “Well, that’s your thought.” To be aware of thought is to learn to watch how our thoughts dictate to us much of our personal and collective experience.

William Isaacs (1999)

Dialogue Circles provide a process for ongoing staff learning and collaborative inquiry at its best. Dialogue Circles combine the relationship competence gained through Sharing Circles with the rigorous knowledge building processes of Learning Circles.

Understanding others by trying to understand meaning systems behind the words.

In Dialogue Circles we set our intention to spend time thinking together about topics, initiatives, challenges, and opportunities relevant to our learning communities. Dialogue Circles are an essential component of an effective issue-resolution or problem-solving process, but they do not aim to resolve or solve anything directly. Rather, dialogue theory posits that it is a good idea to suspend the problem solving impulse during Dialogue Circles. Seeking first to understand, we explore and deepen our perspectives on important issues and systems before we attempt to solve or change things.
**DIALOGUE CIRCLE PROCESS**

We can experience generative dialogue in circles that follow the same four stages as Sharing and Learning Circles. The stages aim to build a safe space for authentic participation by gradually expanding social interactions. Sharing and Learning Circles use partner, small group and large group activities at all stages. In Dialogue Circles, however, it is important that the whole group stays together during the last three stages so that all have the opportunity to hear and hold all the perspectives.

- **1** Opening activities introduce the process and orient people to the topic
- **2** Collaborative Inquiry activities help people explore perspectives, think, and build knowledge together
- **3** Opening activities consolidate knowledge and honour contributions
- **4** Community Building activities make it safe for people to use their voices and share perspectives

The use of a talking piece is, as always, an important ritual that empowers the speaker and reminds others of their responsibility to listen. Each person is encouraged to listen intently, suspending impulses that impede curiosity. Silence after each speaker allows everyone time to reflect on what has been offered. It also allows the next speaker time to absorb the meaning of the contribution before expressing his or her thinking. Speakers may speak to each other, to the talking piece, or to the centre of the circle. Speakers take as much time as they need to fully express their thinking but may have to edit themselves in order to make time and space for the contributions of others.
THINKING TOGETHER

As Parker Palmer wrote in The Courage to Teach, “We have to stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again”. Thinking together is something we do in the present moment, while a thought is something we had in the past. Thinking is fresh, spontaneous, and emergent. Thoughts are based on an individual’s pre-existing perceptions, expectations, assumptions, concerns, and hopes.

Practising thinking together in Dialogue Circles requires us to SUSPEND our certainties and cultivate curiosity. A curious mind is a learning mind. When we listen with curiosity to the perspectives of many others in Dialogue Circles, we realize that we cannot hold onto our certainties and be open to learning at the same time.

When we practise dialogue, we share meanings freely without a compulsive urge to impose our thoughts or to conform to the thoughts of others. We are not required to agree with what we hear, but we are required to SUSPEND our judgements until we have heard and understood all perspectives. We suspend the impulse to make decisions or draw conclusions in favour of hearing the contributions of others. This expands the knowledge base of each individual and creates a common pool of collaboratively built knowledge. The rigour of the Circle Process combined with the use of a talking piece ensures many opportunities to engage many perspectives.

We have to be able to talk about it, to dialogue, to entertain each other’s view, to look at it, calmly; so that each one can look at all the views. Each individual is restored because he or she holds the views of the whole. One does not necessarily agree with all the views, but each individual, through dialogue, can be restored whole, and out of that will emerge a common pool of information which would guide society.

David Bohm (1999)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iWcpBSwWWQ
(this excerpt starts at 5 minutes)

When we think together in this way, we move from identifying with our individual thoughts, to holding the thinking of the group. When we hold all perspectives, not just our own, we enhance our capacity for higher order critical thinking, participatory learning, and knowledge building. We can also question and be questioned about our contributions in the spirit of creating clarity without having to defend our thoughts.

SUSPENDING our certainties and judgements makes way for understanding. When we inquire in this way as staff and administrators, we engage and encourage our students to do the same.
Preparing for dialogue requires us to become aware of adversarial tendencies such as:
- debating,
- defending,
- arguing,
- competing,
- discussing, and
- deciding.

These are powerful and valued cultural tendencies that exist alongside our tendencies towards collaborative interaction. We are constantly exposed to adversarial methods and processes in school and in life. We are often rewarded if we apply them successfully. These modes of interacting aim to promote our own perceptions and exclude the thinking of others.

**DIALOGUE IS…**
- a focus on gaining
- sharing perspectives
- seeking understanding
- collective thinking

**DIALOGUE IS NOT…**
- a focus on winning
- defending perspectives
- making others understand
- individual thought

In contrast, Dialogue Circles provide a process for collaborative inquiry that relies on self-awareness and cultivates curiosity about others. In Dialogue Circles, people purposefully exchange *perspectives* through stories, insights, interests, information, and experiences. Our perspective is our stance or point of view; the context from which we perceive. It becomes a lens through which we view the world. Awareness of the influences shaping our perspectives can make the difference between contributing reflexive thoughts and contributing our freshest and most creative thinking.

**Dialogue Practices**
- Becoming more aware of your own thinking and reasoning (reflection)
- Making your thinking and reasoning more visible to others (sharing)
- Inquiring into others’ thinking and reasoning (curiosity)

These influences can derive from external and internal sources. Our perspectives are externally, or socially, constructed through the stories we are told and the stories we tell about ourselves and others. If we are unaware of the process, we can over-identify with the stories, and lose touch with our authentic selves. Internal influences on our perspectives include internalized social messages and mental models or habits of mind acquired through experiences.

The central role of knowledge-building dialogue means that everyone in the circle needs to pay attention to how they use language. It takes work to keep the focus on dialogue rather than monologues or debates.

Margaret Riel (2013)
There are many models and lenses through which we can explore these influences. Two models that are easy to explain and apply are described below.

1. Understanding our PEACH’s helps us categorize, articulate, and clarify our thinking. PEACH is a useful acronym that reminds us that our perspectives are formed and filtered through our:

Perceptions, Expectations, Assumptions, Concerns, and Hopes.

Our PEACH’s are the low hanging fruit that help people start conversations and untangle their thinking. For any topic, we can ask ourselves and others, “what are our PEACH’s in relation to ...?”

When we categorize our thoughts and feelings in this way, we no longer identify with them. We can feel strongly that we want to see an expectation or a hope fulfilled. And at the same time, we can hold the awareness that our individual perspective may or may not be complete and accurate.

We learn to balance and enlarge our perspectives by seeking input in the form of PEACH’s from others.

We dance around in a ring and suppose,
But the secret sits in the middle and knows.

Robert Frost
Practising dialogue supports the development of a critical mind (a mind able to see beyond surface assumptions and unconscious reactions)... and allows us to see thoughts and the thought process in new light... we can recover wholeness through dialogue.

David Bohm (1996)

2. DeBono’s Thinking Hats model (2010) helps us become aware of the components of critical thinking. The model also illustrates options for exercising and developing our cognitive capacities. We all have the opportunity to wear all of the hats. And it would be impossible to wear them all at the same time. We usually develop a preference for consistently wearing only one or two of these hats. Learning to take our preferred hat(s) off is a lifelong process. However, as we purposefully try on and practise with the hats, we build facility with applying each as a valid cognitive perspective.

The White Hat perspective is concerned with getting and understanding the facts: what is known, what is tangible, and what is observable, now or in the past. White hat thinking strives for objectivity and is very curious about data, statements of fact, available resources, and in dealing with things here and now as they are.

The Black Hat perspective is concerned with exploring the logical negative aspects and consequences of any idea or action. Black hat thinking inquires into limits and challenges and is very curious about worst case scenarios and reality testing.

The Yellow Hat perspective is concerned with seeing the best in the here and now. Yellow hat thinking focuses on identifying and appreciating strengths and assets and how we can best put them to use to make life better.

The Red Hat perspective is concerned with paying attention to physical and emotional feelings and intuitions. Red Hat thinking is deliberately and subjectively assessing likes and dislikes and is very curious about personal and environmental implications.

The Green Hat perspective is concerned with creating the best possible outcomes for any given situation and imagines opportunities now and in the future. Green Hat thinking uses imagination and is very curious about the possibilities that come from making changes and connections amongst ideas, people, systems, and dreams.

The Blue Hat perspective is concerned with observing and facilitating processes. Blue hat thinking encourages others to build consensus, synthesize and integrate their individual perspectives into common knowledge. Blue Hat thinking also wonders which perspectives are missing and is very curious about whether all perspectives have been identified and applied.

Spending time reflecting on and inquiring into our PEACH’s and our preferred Thinking Hats are excellent ways to prepare for dialogue.
ADDITIONAL ROLES FOR DIALOGUE CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS

There are four additional roles that contribute to productive Dialogue Circles. As with the Thinking Hats, we have a preferred role. With practice we can apply and appreciate all of the roles.

Remembering that a circle is ‘a centre with no sides’, these roles are played in relation to the topics at the centre of the circle. Speakers make their contributions in relation to the topic, rather than to other speakers. For example, instead of saying, “I support (or oppose) Jane”, we might say, “I support (or oppose) that statement or idea.”

Movers contribute topics, questions, hypotheses, perspectives, and positions to the circle.

Supporters recognize, affirm, validate, augment, and illustrate contributions to the circle.

Opposers challenge, test, and ask questions in order to clarify contributions to the circle.

Observers pay attention to both the content and the process of the dialogue and offer summaries and reflections. This is a critical role of the co-keeper.

Dialogue Requires...

- Slowing down and observing our own thoughts while we are having them.
- Sitting with uncomfortable feelings.
- Sitting with our judgements and assumptions without acting on them.
- Disentangling our roles from our identities.
- A willingness to risk being known.
- A willingness to inquire into the foundations of our own assumptions.
ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES FOR KEEPERS AND CO-KEEPERS OF DIALOGUE CIRCLES

In addition to all of the responsibilities and roles already addressed in previous chapters, Dialogue Circle practice requires the keeper and co-keeper to model and uphold one more crucial responsibility.

**Exploring Perceptions and Assumptions** is at the heart of Dialogue Circle practice. The keeper and co-keeper show curiosity and model a willingness to reflect upon how perceptions and assumptions influence our understanding.

**The Keeper's Role:**

- Help participants recognize and explore their assumptions and perceptions
- Maintain a non-judgemental tone and environment – all assumptions and perceptions are important
- Set an example by being open oneself about personal assumptions and perceptions

**More Important points about dialogue:**

- Our everyday conversations are loaded with cultural and personal assumptions and these assumptions are mainly unconscious.
- Personal needs remain at the core of our conversations. Dialogue creates space for needs to be expressed and validated.
- Monitoring our internal dialogue is an ongoing practice because our internal dialogue will affect our interpersonal conversations.
- When many people are practicing dialogue, we can see that thought processes are not our ‘own’.
- When we no longer wholly identify with our thoughts, individual and group consciousness is transformed.

**Reflections on Silence**

- Allows time for people to consider the question and process new information.
- Allows for personal reflection.
- Encourages more participation.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO PRACTISE DIALOGUE CIRCLES:

1. Conduct a Dialogue Circle – Sample Topics and Questions

Dialogue on Professional Learning Process:
- As caring adults who work with promising youth, how do you collectively share experiences, puzzles, and challenges now? How is that different from, or similar to, Circle Process?
- What questions do we have about resources, successes and challenges in teaching and program delivery? What are some constructive ways to discover the answers to our questions?
- What are our wishes in regard to our professional development needs and opportunities?

Dialogue on Dialogue Readiness:
- What does it mean to SUSPEND AND NOT DEFEND our certainties?
- What are the preferred Thinking Hats in our group? Which hats are not represented? How can we put that hat on today?
- Which Dialogue role (mover, supporter, opposer, observer), comes most naturally to you? Which role do you identify with least and why?

2. Conduct a Dialogue Circle with “PEACH’s” – Bohm on Information Exchange

Form a circle and read the excerpt on page 47 out loud together; each person reading one sentence at a time. Allow a minute of silence for people to reflect at the end of the reading. Place the talking piece in the centre of the circle and say “When someone is ready to move the dialogue with a PEACH, a reflection, or a question, please pick up the talking piece and start the circle”. Stick with offering PEACH’s for the first two rounds of the talking piece and then open it up for more general contributions.

3. Conduct a Dialogue Circle Using Roles and Thinking Hats

Form a circle and choose one of the readings below. Read your selection out loud together; each person reading one sentence at a time. Allow some silence and then pass the talking piece.

Each person should preface their comments with: “I am playing the role of (mover, supporter, opposer, or observer) and I am wearing my (white, black, yellow, red, green, or blue) hat”.

Then complete the sentence: “From this perspective I think______”.

After several rounds, reflect on the effect of naming and changing our roles and hats.

- Reading 1) Riel on Knowledge Building Dialogue – Page 48
- Reading 2) Technology and Relationships – Page 49
Reading: David Bohm on Information Exchange

You see, everything you know comes from society practically; both information and misinformation. It determines what you do. The individual is formed out of society, and together the individuals form society.

One view would be if we say society consists of a lot of people who are interrelated. You can say that they are interrelated by learning, by information exchange. You can say that is crucial, without the exchange of information (learning) the society would collapse. So that is part of the reality of society.

If every individual would follow their own pool of information it would lead to chaos. Of course you can have the attempt to impose the pool, but that leads to a closed society where even individuals are not tolerated. Or you could have people trying to move together with a common pool through exchanging learning.

People find this difficult to do because everything is divided into nations and religions and other kinds of groups which behave as if they were independent and they are not. We have so many different individuals each with their own divided view and different divided groups and those views are coming into clash.

So in dialogue, we are moving the emphasis from the person as individuals, the divided part, to the information flow, the information field of society and each individual can contain the whole information field of society in his own way.

We have to be able to talk about it, to dialogue, to entertain each other’s view, to look at it, calmly; so that each one can look at all the views. Each individual, when they hold all the views, that person is restored whole because they hold the whole. One does not necessarily agree with all the views, but each individual, through dialogue, can be restored whole and out of that I think will emerge a common pool of information which would guide society.

paraphrased from an interview with David Bohm (1999)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iWcpBSwWWQ
(this excerpt starts about 5 minutes into the interview)
Reading: Knowledge Building Dialogue

Essential to learning circles is a focus on collective cognitive responsibility for knowledge building. Teaching is often seen as a process of creating well vetted materials and sharing these with students who are to learn them. Learning in that context means to be able to repeat back the material with high fidelity... children are instructed to ignore what they think and accept on faith what is known. Teaching in this manner treats knowledge as faith-based rather than evidence-based. Without a respect for the thinking process, the process of building knowledge is lost.

In learning circles, each participant is encouraged to share their thinking, their knowledge structuring with the group. No single person is the expert with the final say on what is, or is not, the truth. Rather the group is charged with finding the basis for their knowing. Young children might wrestle with how they can be sure that the sun is not, as it appears to be, setting at the end of the day. Adults might question the evidence that suggests the technology leads to higher levels of achievement, or how to compare online learning with other means of learning. The work of building and supporting ideas to create models that help make sense of the world is what is meant by knowledge-building dialogue.

Consistent with Berieter's (2002) challenge of the “folk theory of the mind” as a file cabinet, a repository of knowledge, learning circle interaction conceptualizes the mind as a dynamic processor. Language is the power tool for constructing knowledge and given the dynamic, emergent properties of both the social and physical world and our means for understanding, knowledge building involves constant remodeling. The central role of knowledge-building dialogue means that everyone in the circle needs to pay attention to how they use language. It takes work to keep the focus on dialogue rather than monologues or debates. Structuring the work to include multiple projects with multiple participants encourages a process of shared sense making -- of collective cognitive responsibility.

Margaret Riel (2013), Pepperdine University
https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined
The digital revolution has given us new tools to meet people and stay in touch. It’s also changed the way we relate to each other – at home and at work... But fewer and fewer people are using these tools to actually talk to each other... For more and more of us, technology may actually be damaging our relationships with others...

In a virtual world, many relationships today play out in cyberspace ... Text messaging remains the dominant method of instant communication, especially for teens. A recent study by the Journal of Information Technology found that “Cell phones and computers have become essential to the average teenager’s social life, and the average teen spends four hours per day with some sort of device... people age 14 to 29 would rather give up their relationship partner than their cell phone – by a 2-to-1 margin.”

In the blink of an eye, e-mailing, posting, tweeting, instant messaging and texting eliminate eye contact, vocal nuances and other physical and audio cues people rely on when building trust and establishing social relationships. This non-verbal communication represents up to 40 percent of our in-person communication, allowing us to tell how others are feeling by their facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice. The ability to understand and use non-verbal communication is a powerful tool in helping connect with others, express what we really mean, navigate challenging personal situations, and build trust.

Electronic media can make confronting people less stressful – but that can also cause problems. Confronting someone is never pleasant and most of us think twice about doing so. Unfortunately, emails, tweets, posts...and truncated text language make it much easier to send hurtful or inappropriate comments, making a contentious issue much worse.

Adapted from: Life Lines: Improving Your Quality of Life – One Step at a Time Volume 3, Number 2 (2013)

http://www.calgary.ca/CS/HR/Documents/EFAP/EFAP-LifeLines-V3-N2.pdf?noredirect=1
CHAPTER 5: ISSUE CIRCLES

Purpose:

- Providing a process for group consensus
- Restoring balance in relations
- Examining harmful behaviours that inhibit learning and personal growth
- Dealing with conflicts before they become harms

Sharing, Learning, and Dialogue Circles prepare us to explore and resolve issues with others. Circle Processes provide us with the experience of building collective knowledge while expanding our exposure to positive relationship, inquiry, speaking, and listening skills. When we start to feel comfortable and competent with these basic Circle Processes, we are ready to apply our thinking to issues. Effective issue exploration requires many perspectives. The collaborative decision-making process supports collective consensus, the key to making sure that agreements and resolutions are durable.

WHAT ARE ISSUE CIRCLES?

Issue Circles are Dialogue Circles with an important difference: in Issue Circles, we ARE trying to come to a decision or solve a problem together because we want to effect and sustain a change for the better. People with different or competing perspectives come together to build on successes, to capitalize on opportunities, to restore balance, to heal relationships, and to avert harms.

The process of collaborative inquiry into the perspective of each person in the group exercises higher order critical thinking skills. The opportunity to hold the perspective of the whole group broadens the mind and develops interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness.

Examples of Framed Issues

*Issues are more easily approached when framed as questions that we can answer or problems that we can solve. For example:*

- How can we address issues that affect our classrooms?
- How can we restore balance and harmony when an external conflict between students is brought into the school?
- How can we balance the challenges of being a young mother trying to finish high school?
- How can we effectively allocate scarce resources amongst equally deserving programs?
- What is the best way to connect with parents and community partners?
- How can we share and optimize positive transformations?
**ISSUE CIRCLE PROCESS**

Issue Circles provide time and space for people to co-create shared meaning, shared expectations, and commonly desired outcomes. This practice builds capacity for resilience by providing a model for addressing challenges and change. In Issue Circles we:

1) frame an issue as a question that can be answered;
2) conduct a Dialogue Circle on the issue;
3) co-create a vision of ‘better’ or ‘future’;
4) generate options for achieving the vision;
5) co-create a plan for change; and
6) identify the objective criteria that tell us that we’re on our way to ‘better’.

We may wish to engage young voices to participate in resolving issues that have an impact on their lives at school, in the community, and beyond. Or, we may wish to engage staff and administrative voices to address barriers to the functioning, wellbeing, and performance of the school community. Or, community members, staff, or students may wish to engage each other in exploring perspectives or resolving issues. In all cases, the quality of engagement depends on the quality of empowerment.

In order to create the conditions for fully empowered engagement in Issue Circles, three components need to be present: 1) control, 2) support, and 3) a realistic path for change.

**EMPOWERING VOICES**

A circle of problem solvers, dedicated to shared intention and practicing interpersonal respect, is a fully empowered group of people.

Christina Baldwin (1994)
Eighty percent of circles should be proactive. That means using circles to be collaborative, to engage students and to get their input and opinions on issues and how to improve things.

Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel (2010)

Control and Support

We provide control through clarifying expectations, providing structure, and using a fair process that requires perspective sharing and empowered voices. We provide support through positive role modeling, encouragement, and nurturing of capacities and strengths. In this environment we are doing things with people rather than for or to them.

Restorative Practice is about doing things with people, and not to them or for them.

When Control and Support are both present in healthy ways, we empower ourselves and others to take responsibility for our actions and to make things better or as right as possible.

A Path for Change

Authentic empowerment is also dependent on our belief in our ability to implement changes, both as individuals and as a group. We have a positive potential for change when four conditions are present (Wheatley, 2003):

1) we are Dissatisfied with the current state;
2) we can clearly Describe the current state;
3) we have a Vision of a better future; and
4) we have a plan and support for Next Steps.

Issue Circles provide a democratic and inclusive process for creating these conditions. When all are involved in the process, all are committed to ensuring positive outcomes.
The circle represents a fundamental change in the relationship between students and authority figures. It creates a cooperative atmosphere in which students take responsibility for their actions. Students respond because they feel respected and realize that what they say matters.

Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel (2010)

Empowering Brain Power

The empowerment and potential for change people experience in Issue Circles is good for brain health.

Neuroscience and “whole child” research (Daggett 2009) find that opportunities to 1) influence change, 2) experience high quality social interaction, and 3) participate in proactive problem solving and issue-resolving processes provide a nurturing environment to strengthen our neural networks.

When we interact with others, we learn. Whether we are engaging in positive play or we are sitting in circles facing difficult issues, we are building experience and competence for addressing future challenges. Our highest levels of cognitive processing occur when we actively suspend our certainties, open ourselves to the influence of others’ perspectives, and then focus on integrating perspectives.

Confidentiality and Safe Disclosure are important principles of every Circle Process. In Issue Circles, however, we pay special attention to how we introduce and explain these principles because Issue Circles may relate to harms or sensitivities. Depending on the topic, some disclosures may require reporting.

The Keeper’s Role:

- Pass the talking piece to encourage questions and dialogue about the meaning of Confidentiality and Disclosure before introducing a sensitive topic
- Define limits around safe disclosure
- Describe the process and options for private disclosure
- Create and maintain an environment where confidentiality is a value
- Frequently remind all that confidences and disclosures stay with the group
- Explain that the keeper has a duty to report in certain circumstances where a child is in danger

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES FOR KEEPERS AND CO-KEEPERS OF ISSUE CIRCLES
**Deepen Your Restorative Practice**

Begin all contributions to the circle with, “This is my Perspective or Perception, Expectation, Assumption, Concern, Hope, Experience, Reflection, Story, Red Hat, Inference, or Belief”.

The ability to observe and name the type of thought that we are offering means that we are thinking together!

**Promoting the Positive and the “AND” Stance** helps the group move past polarized or positional stances towards integrative solutions. Restorative Practices require us to move beyond either/or stances to AND stances.

**The Keeper’s Role:**
- Frame and ask appreciative questions
- Observe commonalities, strengths, and positives
- Reframe polarizing statements as AND statements
- Encourage others to replace the word BUT with the word AND
- When appropriate, challenge participants to explain another’s perspective

**The AND Stance**

I have a valid perspective AND you have a valid perspective

**CIRCLE KEEPING RESPONSIBILITIES SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 – 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = I would like to learn to do this</th>
<th>3 = I can do this</th>
<th>5 = I can do this very well!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modelling Compassion and Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluating the Effect on Circle Participants</td>
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<td>Managing the Talking Piece</td>
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<td>Explaining Values and Guidelines</td>
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<td>Establishing Routines and Rituals</td>
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<td>Providing for Inclusion and Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Framing and Asking Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summarizing and Recording</td>
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<td>Other?</td>
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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO PRACTISE ISSUE CIRCLES

1. **Hold a Dialogue Circle to Identify Issues and a Vision for Issue Resolution**

1. Use a mix-up activity to sort into Small Circles. Make sure each circle has a talking piece.
2. Pass the Talking Piece and share perspectives on the following question:
   - What are the best things about our school community?
3. Ask one person from each circle to move counter clockwise to the next circle. The person who moves shares a summary of the perspectives with the new circle.
   - Repeat step 2 with the following questions (remembering to move people between groups after each question):
     - What would you like to be doing more of?
     - What issues and concerns would you like to see addressed and resolved in your school community?
     - How do we best build strong relationships in our school community (internally and externally)?
4. Ask each circle to create a list of the points that they remember. If there is time, have them sort their list into themes or ask them to consolidate and make an artistic presentation of their findings.
5. Reconvene the Large Circle. Present and compare themes, similarities, and differences.

2. **Framing Issues as Questions That Can Be Answered**

1. Form a Circle and select one of the following topics or any other appropriate issue:
   - Classroom Conflict
   - Mending Broken Relationships
   - Bullying
   - Addressing Barriers to Learning
2. Form Small Circles and generate appreciative questions that relate to the chosen topic, for example:
   - How do aspects of this issue affect our school communities?
   - What are the possibilities if we do nothing about this issue?
   - What are the possibilities if we do something about this issue?
   (Have a friendly competition to see which group can generate the most questions!)
3. Present the creative questions in the Large Circle as “Framed Issues”.
4. Pass the talking piece: “Which questions do you want answered? Who else can help us explore those questions and how can we engage them?”

3. **Collaborative Issue Resolution: Think it Together**

1. Convene a Dialogue Circle with the whole group. Place your Framed Issue from the previous exercise in the centre of the Circle.
2. Pass the talking piece and share perspectives on the issue. Apply Roles and Hats as lenses to explore the issue.
3. Co-create a vision of ‘better’ or ‘future’.
4. Generate options for achieving the vision.
5. Co-create a plan for change.
6. Identify the objective criteria that tell us that we are on our way to ‘better’.
CHAPTER 6: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CIRCLES

Purpose:
- Restoring equity and balance
- Addressing harm in the community by empowering the voice of all
- Re-integrating people into community through structured interaction

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

There are times when things go wrong or harms have been done and we need to put things as right as possible. It is important that we understand the Restorative Justice process but, as educators, we rely on our local Community Justice Partners to take the lead and be the keepers.

Restorative Justice is a process:
- to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense,
- to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, and
- to heal and put things as right as possible.

The more specific goals (Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2009) of the process include a response to wrongdoing that:
- tries to foster understanding of the impact of the behaviour;
- seeks to repair the harm that was done to people and relationships;
- attends to the needs of victims and others in the school;
- avoids imposing on students intentional pain, embarrassment and discomfort;
  - encourages safe and structured interaction between those harmed and those causing harm whenever appropriate.

Our traditional methods of dealing with harms or crimes are based on what is called the Retributive Justice system: we identify the harms and we identify the offender to blame. Then we punish the offender by imposing a suspension or a sentence. We feel as though justice has been done because the “bad” people have been identified, isolated, and sometimes even removed from the community.

But how can we encourage people to be good by isolating them and treating them as though they are bad? Justice Circles provide people with a way to make amends and be re-integrated into the community (Stuart, 1997).
RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE Versus RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

In the Retributive system neither those harmed nor those who caused the harm have any control or support. The victim has neither a voice nor a choice in the outcome and his or her needs in the situation are rarely taken into consideration. The person who caused the harm is not given the opportunity to take responsibility for his or her actions or to be accountable for making amends to those harmed.

Restorative Justice operates differently. This system aims to restore or make things as right as possible for those who were harmed while allowing those who caused harm to make amends in a way that is meaningful to all affected. Justice circles invite those harmed and those who caused harm to bring their personal supporters to the circle. Justice circles also include the voice of the community; whether it is the school community or the larger community in which the school exists. Justice circles provide a high level of control and support for all affected.

The following table (adapted from Zehr, 2002), highlights the differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How the Justice Process is Viewed</th>
<th>RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE</th>
<th>RESTORATIVE JUSTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The needs of those affected by the crime are secondary</td>
<td>The needs of all those affected by harm are primary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversarial / battle model focused on win-lose outcomes (offender vs. the crown or victim)</td>
<td>Dialogue model focused on understanding, co-operation and addressing harms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reparations, restoration, and restitution is rare</td>
<td>Reparation, restoration and restitution are possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State responds to “wrongdoing” against the Crown</td>
<td>The person harmed, the young person, and the community respond to “harms”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that sense of balance will be restored through retribution</td>
<td>Belief that sense of balance will be restored through opportunity to make amends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice is obtained through having the right rules</td>
<td>Justice is obtained through having the right relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice process alienates participants</td>
<td>Justice process seeks to include all affected participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remorse and forgiveness are discouraged</td>
<td>Remorse and forgiveness are possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on things that happened in the past</td>
<td>Focus is on future possibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignores the reasons behind the harm or behaviour</td>
<td>Seeks to understand the reasons behind the harm or behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
... one can treat students with respect and provide them with support, even while holding them accountable for their behaviour.

Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel (2010)
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE GUIDING QUESTIONS

The Restorative Justice System gives all affected time and space to collaboratively inquire into important questions:

- Who has been affected and how?
- What are the harms?
- What are the needs?
- What are the obligations?

These questions guide the process and create an objective framework through which to view the information being exchanged.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MEETS CIRCLE PROCESS

When we ask these Restorative questions in Circle Process we create a Justice Circle; an optimal learning space for democratic and inclusive justice. Even if we have no experience with Sharing, Learning, or Dialogue Circles, the Justice Circle provides a safe, supportive environment in which all are empowered to express themselves and resolve issues together.

Justice Circles address the Four Directions of Wellbeing and combine aspects of all Circle Processes:

- Like Sharing Circles, they encourage affective statements and emotional validation.
- Like Learning Circles, they encourage collaborative inquiry.
- Like Dialogue Circles, they are based on sharing perspectives, and building shared understanding.
- Like Issue Circles, the emphasis is on co-creating a path for change that honours all perspectives.

The Justice Circle deals with the added dimension of harm. The goal is to make things as “right as possible” and restore wholeness and balance to the people affected and to the community after harm has been done.
Justice circles follow the same general pattern as all Circle Processes: opening, community building, exchanging information, and closing. Because of the added dimension of harm, there are added dimensions to the process.

**The Preparation Stage** begins with inquiring into WHO needs to be involved and what their needs are:
- Who has been hurt?
- Who has caused harm?
- Who else has a stake in this situation?
- Is there support and community representation?

Keepers or Community Justice Partners prepare people to participate. They meet with each person and his or her support people to explain the process. They also prepare each person to talk about his or her needs and expectations.

**The Opening Stage** consists of introducing people, confirming permission to help, and describing the purpose, the process and the principles.

**The Community Building Stage** helps people build agreement on their expectations for respectful interaction. It also helps to prepare people to tell their own experience from their own perspective. Circle keepers and co-keepers stress the importance of repairing harms by addressing needs rather than imposing punishments.

**The Mutual Storytelling Stage** allows everyone in the circle to tell their own truth about how things unfolded for them, the impacts, and other things going on in their lives that may have influenced poor choices or increased the impact of harms.

**The Mutual Thinking About Options Stage** allows people to say what they need in order to move forward, to identify their obligations, and to come up with options to put things as right as possible.

**The Making Agreements Stage** provides a basis for ensuring accountability and a plan to follow up.

**The Closing Stage** recognizes and appreciates the contributions of participants, their co-created understanding, their resolutions for positive change, and the restored relationships.
RESTORATIVE QUESTIONS

The facilitator of a Justice Circle, usually a Community Justice Partner, follows a script that uses restorative questions in order to 1) provide all parties with a fair process, 2) empower them to use their voices, and 3) come up with their own solutions.

Those who caused harm are asked to tell their truth and to give thought to the implications of their actions:

- What happened; how did things unfold?
- What were you feeling or thinking about at the time?
- How did your family and friends react when they heard about the incident?
- What have you thought about since the incident?
- Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
- How have they been affected?
- What have you done to make things better?
- What are your ideas to make things better?
- What positives, strengths, or interests can we build on for a plan?

Those who were harmed, their supporters, and the support people for those who caused harm are given the opportunity to hear the whole story and to tell theirs:

- What was your reaction at the time of the incident?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- How have you been affected?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What would you like from today’s circle?
- What would make things as right as possible for you?
The beauty of both sets of Restorative Questions is that they can be used anywhere, anytime. We can use the questions informally and proactively to intervene in a school yard squabble, a class misunderstanding, or in a staff dispute in order to de-escalate conflict or prevent harm.

In fact, the more time we spend introducing these questions in informal settings, before harm has been done, the less time we will spend in formal justice circles later. They are powerful questions that allow us to do things WITH people, not TO them or FOR them.

**What is Restored?**

- Relationships and understanding of relationships.
- Balance of relations: individual and community.
- Openness and team orientation.
- Awareness of how our actions affect others.
- Ability to empathize with others’ perceptions.
- Trust and security in the school community.
**RESTORATIVE SCRIPTS**

We include a sample of a Restorative Justice Circle Script in this chapter for your review and as a reference. This script includes the Restorative Questions and follows a procedure that allows stories to be told and for the community to collaboratively decide on a path that makes things “as right as possible”.

**Opening & Community Building:** To get permission to help; to describe process; to agree on tone and purpose.
- Do you want some help?
- Do you want to solve this problem or make things better?
- Are you willing to tell your truth? (the truth about how they have experienced the situation)
- Describe the process and review the concepts of confidentiality and voluntary participation.
- What do you need to talk to each other? (What ground rules do they need?)

**Story Telling & Dialogue:** To allow people to express themselves; to take responsibility; to clarify and explain action; to convey impacts.

**Ask those who caused harm:**
- “What happened?”
- “How did things unfold?”
- “What were you thinking about at the time?”
- “How did you feel?”
- “What have you thought about since the incident?”
- “Who do you think has been affected by your actions?”
- “How have they been affected?”

**Ask those who were harmed:**
- “What was your reaction at the time of the incident?”
- “How do you feel about what happened?”
- “How have you been affected?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?”
- “How did your family and friends react when they heard about the incident?”

**Ask Supporters / parents / caregivers / teachers:**
- “Where were you when you heard about what happened?”
- “What did you think when you heard about the incident?”
- “How do you feel about what happened?”
- “How have you been affected?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?”
- “What do you think are the main issues?”

**Ask those who caused harm:**
- “Is there anything you want to say at this time?”
Exploring Options and Making Agreement: To make things as right as possible.

Ask those who were harmed and their supporters:

- "What would you like from today’s conference?"
- "What would make things as right as possible for you?"

Ask those who caused harm and their supporters:

- "What have you done to make things better?
- "What are your ideas to make things better?
- "What positives, strengths, or interests can we build on for a plan?"

☐ It is important to ask the young people to respond to each suggestion before the group moves to the next suggestion, asking “What do you think about that?”
Allow for negotiation.

☐ As an agreement develops, clarify each item and make the written document as specific as possible, including details, deadlines, and follow-up arrangements.

☐ Check to make sure that you have accurately recorded what has been decided.

Closing the Conference: To move forward.

☐ Provide everyone with a final opportunity to speak.
☐ Allow for participants to respond to each other.
☐ Thank people for contributions in dealing with this difficult matter.
☐ Congratulate people on working through the issues.
☐ Allow participants an informal period after the formal conference to have refreshments and interact.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES TO PRACTISE JUSTICE CIRCLE PROCESS

1. **Hold a Dialogue Circle**

Pass the talking piece and share perspectives on any of the following questions:

1. Think about a time when someone caused you, your family member, or your property harm. How was it dealt with? What did you need to make things better?
2. How do you feel about the response of the retributive justice system for the people involved?
3. Looking at the comparison of Retributive vs. Restorative justice systems (pages 57 and 58), where do you see yourself?
4. How does your experience of harm or justice shape your perspective?
5. How much do you know about the Community Justice Partners available to your school community? How can you get to know them better?
6. Think about a recent suspension or incident at your school. How could a Justice Circle have created a different outcome?

2. **Self-Assessment: Restorative Readiness – Finding Your Comfort Zone**

1. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 – 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 = I would like to learn to do this</th>
<th>3 = I can do this</th>
<th>5 = I can do this very well!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing high levels of both Support &amp; Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to examine and share PEACH’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to engage in collaborative inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on empowering others to find their own solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making affective statements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Restorative Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating an Impromptu Conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating an Issue or Dialogue Circle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-facilitating a Justice Circle with a Mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Pass the talking piece and share perspectives and experiences related to your comfort zones.
3. Pass the talking piece: What plans do you have for becoming more comfortable with Restorative Practices?

3. **Restorative Role Plays**

1. Role-play the Scenarios found on Page 66, one at a time. Directions are included for each.
2. After each role play, pass the talking piece and hold a Dialogue Circle on the experience.
SCENARIOS FOR ROLE PLAYS

1. An intermediate student, Leo, has an enduring habit of talking to his friends during class making flip remarks when called upon. He gets others involved in his disruptive behavior and seems to enjoy interrupting your instruction and other students’ work time. As a staff person, you want to tell him about the impact this is having on you.

In Pairs: 
Come up with 2 affective statements that you could use to help Leo understand your perspective (affective statements usually follow the formula: “When I see you (describe behaviour), I feel (describe emotion), and I think (express your assumption or concern). I wonder if you can help me (describe a more desirable state or behaviour)”.

1. 
2. 

In the Whole Circle: Share affective statements and reflections on the scenario.

2. Your affective statement intervention worked well with Leo for a while, but now it is a new semester. You have many new students in class and 4 new subjects to teach. Leo is a good kid, but he’s been clowning too much and today you blew up at him. You feel you need a third party to help you talk, right now! You ask another staff member to intervene with the Restorative Questions because you know he or she has been trained in Restorative Practices.

In Groups of 3: 
Review the Restorative questions on page 61. Take turns in the role of Restorative Practitioner and practise intervening between the staff person and Leo with the Restorative Questions. Start with “What happened?”

In the Whole Circle: Share your observations and insights.

3. Your class is working in groups at round tables. Leo is at a table at the back of the room with 4 other students. They are all laughing and whispering and you are fed up. You notice Leo crumpling up a paper and wonder what he is up to now. You decide to hold an impromptu Circle to get the class back on track.

In Groups of 6: 
Use a combination of affective statements and the Restorative Questions. Role play the teacher (or Learning Resource Coordinator or Instructional Assistant or Child and Youth Worker) using the Restorative Questions to empower the students to come up with their own solutions to getting the class back on track.

In the Whole Circle: Share your observations and insights.
CONCLUSION: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When we started implementing Restorative Practices at UCDSB, we had questions:

- Could Restorative Practices help us engage students and achieve our goals for Student Success?
- Could we create the conditions for more peaceful schools and improve learning environments?
- Could we identify and overcome challenges to implementation?

We envisioned that Restorative Practices could:

1. be easily learned and easily adapted to the unique needs and cultures of our diverse school communities;
2. integrate with existing practices that support Student Success such as Differentiated Instruction, Collaborative Problem Solving, Appreciative and Collaborative Inquiry, and Character Education;
3. support the creation and maintenance of optimal learning spaces that include all Four Directions of Wellbeing - intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional.

We learned that embedding Restorative Practices meant cultivating abilities to make affective statements, to ask ourselves and others restorative questions, to prepare ourselves for impromptu or more formal collaborative inquiry, and to gain confidence with applying collaborative inquiry to resolving issues in groups.

(Adapted from Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel, 2010)

Informal .......................................................... Formal
Unstructured .......................................................... Structured
Personal Feelings .................. Collaborative Inquiry .................. Repairing Harms
Focus on Self ...................... Focus on Others ...................... Focus on Society
Introspection ...................... Interaction ......................... Facilitation
Empowering Self ................ Empowering Others ............ Empowering Community

We hoped that by focusing on building competence with informal and unstructured practices we could decrease the need for more formal and structured interventions. We selected Circle Process as an inclusive, supportive, and simple methodology to explore and realize the potential of Restorative Practices.
OUR OBSERVATIONS SO FAR...

We’ve learned a lot about how to get started, how to engage and empower voices, how to integrate curriculum, and how to support our students and staff to achieve their full potential in a caring environment.

In this handbook, we have documented the process and provided you with many samples of the significant learning and insights of the wonderful educators and students who practised with us. Below is a summary of their consolidated, co-created knowledge:

1. Our existing values and visions for success align with those of Restorative Practices.
2. Restorative Practices grow out of and are most effective when embedded and practised through Circle Processes.
3. Circles Processes are more than just an effective way to learn about, implement, and deepen Restorative Practices. They are democratic and socially equitable structures that empower and engage voices.
4. As we move from simple Sharing Circles to more complex Issue and Justice Circles, we see that the processes encompass each other. All Justice Circles encompass aspects of Sharing, Learning, Dialogue, and Issue Resolution.
5. Combining the empowering structure of Circles with the empowering intention of Restorative Practices provides us with a remarkable resource for our school communities.
6. Practising Circle Processes builds our competence to intervene restoratively in a wide range of situations using the options on the Restorative Practices continuum.
7. Restorative Practices are any actions that create, restore, or strengthen relationships and understanding between people. Circle Process is one of these actions and the more circles we do the stronger our relationships become in the community.
8. We’ve built relationships with and can enlist the help of Community Justice Partners to informally and formally help us repair harm and restore balance.
9. Learning with others is learning about others (and ourselves)!
10. The road to success is PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE!
Peer Insights about Benefits

✓ Strengthens community in the classroom.
✓ Empowers the voices of all.
✓ Supports inclusivity and equality.
✓ Creates an atmosphere of comfort and calm.
✓ Provides a forum to identify and describe values, observe them in action, and put them into practice.
✓ Provides a way for people to connect with and support each other.
✓ Identifies and addresses barriers to learning.
✓ Changes behaviours in the classroom.
✓ Supports curriculum expectations; for example, the listening and speaking strands of any course.
✓ Engages the students quickly on topic.
✓ Supports professional learning.

Students may be attracted to this forum in the belief that it is a way of avoiding ‘school work’ not realizing that they are learning in a much more important and meaningful way

Kids look forward to it!
We hope you use this handbook as a guide to the process of embedding Restorative Practices in your school community. Adapt the models, information, and suggested activities to suit your unique circumstances and to address your puzzles, questions, and needs.

This handbook is a work in progress and will evolve with us as we continue our practice. We still have much to learn and many more questions for the circle.

NEXT STEPS...

Restorative practices are more than just a program, they are a way of being; a cultural commitment to engaging and empowering voices, ALL OF THEM, in exploring, designing, and improving school experience to ensure student success.

To deepen your practice and continue learning about Restorative Practices and Circle Processes, we highly recommend two companion resources:


Are you ready to practice with us?

You can get started right away with the Daily Circle Routine

on the next page...
A DAILY RESTORATIVE PRACTICE
adapted from Restorative Justice Training provided by Lynn Zammit

This method is a powerful tool that holds students accountable to their peers and to program expectations.

Every day, a circle starts and ends the program. The morning circle is designed to bring students into a sense of community. The circle process is led by a student who oversees the process for the day. Each of the other students is responsible for a section of the group process. These include:

Check-in: A time to reconnect with each student and assess their readiness for the day’s activities

Current Events: Keeping in touch with the world around us

Weather: Awareness of our natural environment and part of excursion and field trip preparation

Joke of the Day: Developing the resiliency skill of humour

Creative Thinking: Firing up the neurons with a problem-solving task and gently moving students towards greater problem solving skills linked to the social and emotional curriculum

Quote of the Day: Sharing responses to a quote given to them the previous day as part of a journal homework activity in which they write a reflective response

Goals: Reflecting on their personal goals set for the day or week

Business: Managing classroom behavior through a circle process where students are encouraged to take ownership for their behavior, generate strategies that will help them overcome negative patterns of behaviour, make amends in some way, and be reintegrated into the classroom community if necessary

End-of-Day Wrap Up: Evaluating the progress made throughout the day; whether goals were achieved and what will be done differently tomorrow
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SUGGESTED RESOURCES


VIDEOS TO WATCH

From Hostility to Harmony
International Institute for Restorative Practices, 4.5 minutes http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQWNySrQSao

Head Games – Mending the Conflict
From Kingston’s Youth Diversion Program in Association with Limestone Education Foundation, 4 parts - 107 minutes total: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpyZJESt2mo

Mending Conversations – A Step by Step Guide
From Kingston’s Youth Diversion Program in Association with Limestone Education Foundation, 2 parts – 45 minutes total: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SpKxt85m8

Restorative Justice is the Law
From Heartspeak Productions in Association with Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives, 48 minutes http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OGgm_U96D8&feature=c4-overview&playnext=1&list=TLS_atnaL1cAE

Restorative Justice: It’s Elementary
Lansing District School Board, Michigan, 5 minutes http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUA1AVf1SqI&list=PL0D6FD851AFB25BF8
Restorative Justice: Repairing the Harm
Monmouth Millenium Green Incident, 12 minutes
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6dMNNn1gPXM

Restorative Practices from Hull (UK): The First Restorative City
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qc6zYvnvac

Restorative Practices; Student Voices
San Fransisco United School District, 5 minutes
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IllaTkSktw

What is Restorative Justice?
Simon Fraser University Continuing Education, 3 mins (see others in their series)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sE8TDzlR2tg

OTHER WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Restorative Justice Online:
http://www.restorativejustice.org/university-classroom

Teaching and Reaching for Rigor, Relevance & Relationships
http://www.slideshare.net/merlene.gilb/rigor-relevance-relationships

Youth Justice Fund Projects (Justice Department of Canada)
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine and Lorayne were privileged to work together on this truly collaborative project: facilitating learning circles, exchanging perspectives, pooling information and resources with workshop participants, and documenting the collective knowledge building process of the many wonderful staff and students at Upper Canada District School Board. It was a joy to think together.

Lorayne Bradshaw, an educator for over fifty years, envisions learning communities in which every voice is heard and every individual has a place, environments where students and staff join in exploring the rich heritage and collective knowledge available to all of us in this age of extensive information access. She believes that Restorative Practices offer educators a method of engaging students in meaningful, relevant, and exciting dialogue about what interests and motivates them while at the same time building the relationships and trust inherent in all important human interactions. She has watched at risk, highly-challenging students embrace Circle Process as a communication medium in which to explore complex social issues and apply high order thinking processes with their teachers and their peers to find equitable solutions. Encountering Catherine Wills and forming a partnership for exploring ways to embed Restorative Practices in school culture has turned out to be the highlight of a rather long career in education.

Catherine Wills is a practising Chartered Mediator and a facilitator. She helps people in conflict, justice, and collaboration scenarios use democratic and community-based approaches to think and act strategically and compassionately together. Thirty years of experience with workplace, labour relations, community, and family mediation has given her a great respect for how Restorative Practices can empower people to share and integrate perspectives. Catherine has an M.A. in Conflict Studies and many advanced certificates in the fields of conflict engagement and mediation. She is a longtime volunteer Youth Justice Committee facilitator with Kingston’s Youth Diversion Program and Leeds-Grenville’s RNJ Youth Services and served on the Board of Directors for Kingston Employment and Youth Services for many years. Cathy is especially grateful for the experience of collaborating with Lorayne Bradshaw, who has been so generous with her experience, wisdom, and vision. www.cjwills.com