

Sabbatical Report
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Circle Time

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Clifton School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and to the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available for principals.

Thank you to my able Deputy Principal who so capably ran the school in my absence.

I would like to thank Mary-Anne Brice of Te Tai Hauauru RTL B Cluster for her suggestions, advice and guidance and putting me in contact with a network of schools and other RTL B teachers who gave of their time to speak with me and arrange people to meet with.

I would like to acknowledge my professional colleagues who I visited for their support in answering my questions and who gave me their time to share their experiences of Circle Time and what this was like in their schools.

Having the opportunity to investigate an area of interest as well as returning to school after this sabbatical experience has been truly valuable.

Purpose:

- To advance my knowledge and understanding of the Circle Time behaviour management system.
- To improve our school and classroom delivery by visiting schools who are using the programme successfully and to review recent literature and share it with staff

Questions

I wanted the opportunity to gather information about Circle Time in these main areas.

1. Extend my understanding of the philosophy and practices that underpin Circle Time and how schools have adapted their Circle Time practices within their own school culture
2. By visiting schools where they are using Circle Time effectively and investigate ideas for future development to share with staff in my own school
3. To explore how particular schools have clustered to share ideas and to develop and support each other in Circle Time development.

Circle Time

Introduction:

In history indigenous peoples often used the circle for decision making and conflict resolution. The stone circles of the stone age and other historical European sites, may have been used in decision making and conflict resolution as the North American Indian used the medicine wheel in this way. In modern times the 'quality circle' model used in business began in Japan in the 1980's. The quality learning circle is used effectively in schools to reflect on pedagogy and practice and more recently in the restorative practices system being introduced into schools. All of these systems use circles. Does this mean we have come full circle?

"Circle time or the use of circles helps children to develop social and co-operative skills and build emotional literacy as this is an effective way to develop a collaborative, safe learning environment for all our students." Sue Roffey 2006

Our Experience of Circle Time:

Our development in circle time started in a piecemeal way when our RTLB suggested that two classes try circle time as a way forward for an experienced teacher who had a Y3 class and a teacher of Yr 7/8 who was looking for an effective model of a class meeting structure. It seemed that our children were unable to cooperate at the expected level especially during sporting events and other outside/ out of class activities. It was decided that these two teachers would trial this approach for a year and then if we could see that Circle Time was an effective class management and behaviour initiative the rest of the school would come on board the following year. These two teachers attended a professional development seminar with Jenny Mosley www.circle-time.co.uk

During the year we had frequent discussions and meetings involving teachers and the RTLB. The programme worked so well for these two teachers that we decided we would hold a whole school development over the next year. We began by holding a Teacher Development day before the school year began with Therese Hoyle Success Partnership (theresehoyle.com) at our school to which other teachers from our cluster of schools were invited. (At this time, Therese was living in NZ but is now living in England) and gradually teachers implemented the programme into their timetable.

We did this by each teacher agreeing to hold a timetabled Circle Time meeting each week and to follow a prescribed plan as demonstrated through our professional development as a way of starting. We also purchased teacher and pupil resources and through our school assemblies asserting the six school wide Circle Time golden rules. We ensured we had a staff meeting time for Circle Time and a question box. We worked in pairs to view other teachers' class programmes in action. We do now have visitors from out of the area to observe the school programme in action. Eventually we became the lead school for our local schools cluster and shared our development and programme with them.

It was important that each class was completing a weekly Circle Time class meeting as this meant the introduction was school wide and we did make use of our two experienced teachers as well as regular visits by the RTLB teacher either to demonstrate or observe the class meeting. As the children became familiar with the Circle Time programme and teachers became more at ease and confident using strategies the school became aware of the benefits of the programme. One difficulty is getting new staff to implement the programme in their classes. They need time to come to grips with the programme and observe and attend other classes when conducting circle time activities. It also takes time to up-skill new staff to there is a consistent school approach.

The strengths of the programme are consistency of a school wide approach and I do not think that it is easy to complete a programme of Circle Time in isolation (only one room in the school) as it needs to be a school wide approach.

Sue Roffey in her book "Circle Time for Emotional Literacy" states that "children developing relationships is an important skill that the children need living in our society" (2006) Her principles of Circle Time are; Democracy, Respect, Empathy, Community, Inclusion, Choice, Safety, Agency and Locus of Control, Reflection, Creativity and Positive Emotionality.

All the school Principals I contacted said in their view consistency of approach throughout the school was vital. I think the programme can be adapted to fit the needs of the children or the school and I did speak to schools who have chosen to move away from the strict model. We have 6 school golden rules from Jenny Mosely's Circle Time but one large school I visited had only 3 school golden rules.

I have always believed the children who are always well behaved should be rewarded for their positive behaviour. We have class and school golden time and at the end of term 2 we hold a Big Day In (school fun activities) and at the end of term 4 a Big Day Out, (a school trip to a fun venue at the end of the year.) Some children do lose the privilege to attend through their behaviour not being acceptable though they do get two chances. The other idea is children may lose class golden time but can earn half of it back can be a positive aid. We also have MVP's (Most Valuable Pupil) awards at our weekly school assembly. Children receive a certificate and mentioned in the weekly school newsletter. I did hear of a school and they get the children to walk on the "magic carpet" to the applause of the school as a positive reward for children displaying excellent problem solving behaviour.

We need to adapt and change our programme to sustain interest and momentum and continue to re-shape our programme through using new ideas. We will continue to attend professional development as it becomes available as I know Jenny Moseley regularly visits NZ. RTLB often have this information about impending visits and seminars.

Other ideas I saw at schools I visited were playground friends, Craze Week activities, a school friendship stop and playground zones. The biggest advantage of this programme for

children is having a forum to discuss their problems and the other children assisting with problem solving ideas to help them. Over time we have found that children ask if they can have extra session or a teacher may decide to hold a session if an issue needs to be discussed or addressed.

We have also found that our senior children, who have grown through the school with circle time, are capable of leading parts of the programme. Parents and our school community also positively support the programme. Another positive is that the Principals who have implemented the Restorative Practices and Positive Behaviour for Learning programmes into their schools have found the existing Circle Time culture within the school has supported these programmes and staff commented to me that their transition to these programmes implemented smoothly.

I know that within our cluster of 10 schools we are the only school who has a full circle time programme running throughout the school but there are other schools using it in individual rooms. Experience tells us that while it works well in those rooms the idea of Circle Time is an effective school wide system and improves the whole school culture and can be built upon by introducing new aspects to the programme or adapted to fit your school's situation. We have to rely on our RTLB's for new ideas or websites. Schools do not often share their Circle Time programmes or information on their school websites. Schools I did visit had nearby schools also using this programme and they were able to share practices, ideas and effective activities with them. The RTLB instituted groups to share good practice and introduce and trial new practices with nearby schools. This would be a bonus for us as a small rural school we do not have surrounding schools to do this with. Maybe an on line users group would be a place to begin.

I was surprised the number of schools who are using Circle Time and I am pleased to know that in the future it will assist our school move to some of the restorative approaches other schools have found work well in conjunction with Circle Time. It is a very effective tool as a component of their behaviour management strategy.

References and Resources

There are many resources available for information of the circle time approach. An entry of Circle time will bring up many contacts in your search engine. Some I have already mentioned but others in this field with publications and websites are;

Websites

Jenny Moseley www.circle-time.co.uk

Therese Hoyle. Success Partnership (*theresehoyle.com*)

Sue Roffey www.sueroffey.com

Margaret Thorsborne www.thorsborne.com.au

Authors

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