

First Australian Positive Psychology in Education Symposium
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A Pedagogy for Participation Learning to Live Together Well

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What would you expect in a healthy, positive relationship?

- Trust and respect
- Positive communication
- Give and take
- Affection and warmth
- Feeling good and having fun
- Support
- Equality



What do we often see in schools?



- Bullying
- Cliques
- Exclusion
- Prejudice
- Put downs / negative communications
- Cool to be unkind
- Lack of relational skills
- Focus on rules
- Depressed, disconnected, anxious kids (and teachers)

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We learn how to be and how to live together by...

- Watching
- Experiencing
- Listening to what others say
- Talking and thinking
- Being encouraged to make connections
- Opportunities to have agency - take action - make a difference
- Developing problem-solving strategies
- Feeling we belong
- By being asked good questions

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Circle Time is one way to meet the challenge



- Circle Time is an **experiential, discursive and reflective pedagogy**
- It is framework for **group interaction** based in a philosophy and set of **principles** that are **democratic, respectful, safe and inclusive**.
- It addresses issues in a **positive** and often indirect way, using a range of activities often presented as games.

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The dual aims are symbiotic...

- to develop a caring classroom ethos and sense of belonging - increasing school connectedness
- to develop the self-awareness, social and emotional skills that support resilience and healthy relationships



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Circle Time Solutions

- Based in positive psychology
- Strengths based
- Solution focused
- Maximises safety
- Actively promotes positive emotionality
- Collaboration and cooperation rather than competition

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The basic principles

- INCLUSION and DEMOCRACY
 - Everyone gets a turn
 - When you have your turn to speak everyone will listen to you because what you have to say is important
 - This means that you need to listen to others when they are speaking
- CHOICE and SAFETY
 - No-one has to contribute - you may 'pass' when it is your turn
- RESPECT
 - There are no 'put-downs' - only push-ups
 - We don't laugh at or gossip unkindly about what people have said
 - We talk about issues, we do not name or blame.

These 'rules' are repeated at the beginning of every circle time session - initially by the teacher and then by students as they become more familiar with the framework

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What happens?

- Circles occur regularly, at least weekly
- Everyone sits in a circle to promote equality
- Participants are regularly mixed up to do things with different people - this breaks down barriers
- Each person has a turn in any activity including feedback - the aim is to keep turns brief
- There are few rules but constant reminders of these
- The teacher is a facilitator not a controller
- Circles are regular, short and fun!
- The learning in Circles is applied every day

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Examples of activities

- Greeting game
- Sentence completion
- Silent statements
- Paired interview
- Pair share
- Whole group game
- Small group activity
- Calming closing activity eg visualisation, relaxation or reflection.



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Does it work? Recent research

- 18 UWS undergraduate students
- 8 Greater Western Sydney schools
- Each student giving each school 100 hours of community service to support Circle Time
- Each student writes reflections over time on their experiences - submitted in a final portfolio
- Qualitative analysis

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Before Circles

Children knew little about their feelings and how to regulate emotions. They acted on impulse rather than logic, and lacked assertive skills. There were deficiencies in communication and little awareness of or relationships with others. Children lacked skills in relating to others.

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Outcomes for students

- *“It’s the only time in the week I’m not scared of making a mistake”*
- *“I like Circle Time because you can say what you want to say”*
- *“I like Circle Time because you learn more and trust more”*
- *“You get to know each other”*
- *“You play games you can learn things from”*

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Outcomes for classes

- *It was remarkable to see the children that I had been working with since March working together as a team and creating friendships and bonds. . . . No longer were they being disruptive and not talking to one another. . .*

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Differences in effectiveness

- Circles work better where teachers believe social and emotional issues are important and want involvement
- Where teacher student relationships are caring rather than controlling
- Where the principles of CT are congruent with the values of the school
- Where the school sees itself as a learning organisation

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Facilitator skills

- *For CT to be effective, facilitators must have positive and professional regard in all aspects of their classroom engagement. I need to be able to evaluate my own emotional literacy and the inter- and intra-personal skills needed such as empathy, listening, attention, and praise when implementing CT within the classroom.*

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Further Information

- www.sueroffey.com
- www.wellbeingaustralia.com.au