

Talking Circles

Talking circles foster respect, enhance self-concept, nurture a sense of belonging and affirm identity. Talking circles are most useful: - when the topic has no right or wrong answer; - when moral or ethical issues need to be addressed; - when consensus is not required. Talking circles may also be useful: - to introduce new ideas/concepts; teach the significance of the circle for various Aboriginal cultures; promote respect for the opinions and ideas of others; develop a trusting environment where students feel free to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings; develop listening and speaking skills in a safe, affirming environment; respond to literature, other media, or important issues.

Guidelines for Talking Circles

- The group sits in a circle and each person has a turn to contribute. An object (stone, stick or other) can be used to signify whose turn it is to speak.
- The teacher facilitates by ensuring that guidelines are followed.
- Direct comments to the question or issue, not to comments that another participant has made.
- Avoid responding either negatively or positively to participants' comments.
- Silence is an acceptable response.
- There must be no negative consequences, however subtle, for passing.
- Show respect for others by listening when they speak.
- Explain that self-putdowns or putdowns of others are unacceptable.
- Ensure that everyone has a turn to speak.

The facilitator should model respectful listening and speaking by participating in the talking circle. The facilitator might also consider the size of the group. Small groups are preferable when students are uncomfortable speaking in a large group or when time constraints are an issue.

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