



Making Connections in a Socially Distanced School Environment: Year 2

Principal Name: Angela Ayers

School Name: Little Turtle Elementary School

Team Members' Names: Jessica Herb, Shannon Scott

Principal's Email Contact: ayersar@wccsonline.com

Background Leading to Our Inquiry (Slide 2)

- ⊙ Maintaining a safe and caring school community
- ⊙ How do we do this when social distancing is the expectation and requirement of the district?
- ⊙ Larger class sizes due to the option of Remote Learning
- ⊙ Students coming and going as families are impacted by the virus
- ⊙ How do we get this message out to teachers without it seeming like just one more thing?

The Purpose of Our Inquiry (Slide 3)

Therefore, the purpose of our action inquiry was to create and grow a paradigm shift within staff by using the Circle process of communication.

Our Wondering (Slide 4)

With this purpose, we wondered: Will the practice of Circles within classroom and other school communities (small groups, counseling groups etc.) have a positive impact on relationships between students and students, and students and staff?

Our Actions (Slide 5)

- Teacher Leader Connectedness and Study of Circles
- Different Roles within the School Community
- Teach, Lead, and Facilitate the Process of a Circle
- Complete a Google Form
- Teacher Leaders Reflect Together on the Forms and Discuss

Data Collection (Slide 6)

We used a Google Form to record the information we wanted to collect. We then used this information to determine if the outcome of the Circle helped to maintain a positive school environment.

Our Data (Slides 7-9)

We had more Responsive Circles than Restorative or SEL. We had more Restorative Circles than SEL. These two types of circles are based on need rather than a routine teaching lesson such as would be the SEL Circles. Classroom teachers will need to be intentional and build these Circles into their day with students. The Guidance Counselor and Administrator will often work together on Restorative and Responsive Circles to be sure that communication to parents is timely and explicit.

Our Discoveries (Slide 10)

- ❖ Must Be Intentional and Well Planned
 - ❖ Parents Must be Informed when their child is a part of a Restorative Circle (phone or video call) or Responsive Circle (email)
 - ❖ Most students felt empowered and valued after participating in a Circle
 - ❖ Most teachers felt the Circle was helpful in moving the class forward through a difficult situation or building a positive classroom environment.
 - ❖ The Circle is not always a good choice of process.
-
- ❖ All Circles must be well thought out and intentional. Questions asked to students for each round, should be carefully considered.
 - ❖ There may be sensitive issues, feelings, and specific situations which come up during a Circle that may prompt a student to, unknowingly to the facilitator, withdraw. It is critical that communication with parents occurs so that they are able to further help students process through their feelings and thoughts.
 - ❖ We noticed that most students participated in each circle and shared thoughts rather than "passing" on their opportunity to speak.
 - ❖ We noticed that teachers reacted positively to the Counselor or Principal when Restorative or Reactive Circles were necessary.
 - ❖ Adults must be ready to shift the power of the dynamics and relationships between adults and students. If this shift in power is not appropriate for whatever reason, Circle is not a good choice of process.

Where We Are Headed Next (Slide 11)

As a team of Teacher Leaders, we believe, based on our experiences and the data, Circles would be an effective tool to promote and sustain the safe, healthy and positive school community that all staff benefit from. Therefore, it is our vision to begin the process of training all staff members to successfully facilitate a SEL, Restorative, or Responsive Circle within their classrooms.

We also think it would be very interesting to collect data that would determine if intentional and well planned SEL Circles, led by the Guidance Counselor, Classroom Teacher, or Principal, would diminish the amount of necessary Restorative or Responsive Circles necessary. In other words, would teaching SEL skills positively impact the number of

disciplinary referrals?

Lastly, the relationship between the Guidance Counselor and the Principal is more than just playing nicely together. We have found in our time together helping one another facilitate Restorative, Reactive, and SEL Circles, we can significantly affect systematic change in the school climate. This is a continual work in progress and one we look forward to taking on in the future.

Bibliography (Slide 12)

Balch, Bradley V., Balch, Tonya C. (2019). *Building Great School Counselor-Administrator Teams: A Systematic Approach to Supporting Students, Staff, and the Community*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree Press

Boyes-Watson, Carolyn, Pranis, Kay. (2015). *Circle Forward: Building A Restorative School Community*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Living Justice Press

van Woerkom, Marieke. (2018). Building Community With Restorative Circles. Retrieved From <https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-community-restorative-circles>

Citing Our Presentation

Presentation

Ayers, A., Herb, J., Scott, S. (2021). Making Connections in a Socially Distanced School Community. Presented at the annual Indiana Principal Leadership Institute Showcase of Schools, Indianapolis, IN.

The background features a white background with several colorful circles and dashed lines. On the left, there is a large teal circle with a white center, a smaller teal circle, and a dashed teal circle. On the right, there is a large lime green circle, a smaller green circle, and a dashed green circle. At the bottom left, there is a large green circle with a white center, a smaller orange circle, and a dashed yellow circle. At the bottom right, there is a large yellow circle, a smaller orange circle, and a small pink circle. A dashed blue line curves across the page, connecting the circles.

MAKING CONNECTIONS IN A SOCIALLY DISTANCED SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Little Turtle Elementary
School

Angela Ayers

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Teacher Leaders: Shannon
Scott – Kindergarten
Jessica Herb – School
Counselor

Background Leading to this Inquiry

- ⦿ Maintaining a safe and caring school community
- ⦿ How do we do this when social distancing is the expectation and requirement of the district?
- ⦿ Larger class sizes due to the option of Remote Learning
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Purpose of this Inquiry

- © To create and grow a paradigm shift within staff by using the Circle Process of communication

A decorative background featuring a large, light blue dashed circle. Inside and outside this circle are various colored shapes: a large lime green circle at the top left, a large cyan ring at the top center, a large yellow circle at the top right, a large orange circle at the bottom left, and a large orange ring at the bottom right. Smaller circles in green, blue, orange, and pink are scattered throughout. A blue circle containing the white quotation mark "“" is positioned above the main text.

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"Implementing a philosophy involves more than teaching a set of practices. Implementing restorative practices calls for a paradigm shift--a change in the head and in the heart."

Nancy Riestenberg-School Climate Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education

Our Wondering



Will the practice of Circles within classroom and other school communities (small groups, counseling groups etc.) have a positive impact on relationships between students and students, and students and staff?



Our Actions

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"Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success"

Henry Ford

Circle Data January - April 2021

Data Collection



We used a Google Form to record the information we wanted to collect. We then used this information to determine if the outcome of the Circle helped to maintain a positive school environment.

Our Data

**Restorative
Discipline
(Removal From
Classroom
Environment)**

**Responsive
Conflict
Bullying
Community
Building**

**SEL
Mindfulness
Friendship
Problem
Solving**

Our Data

	Restorative	Responsive	SEL
Shannon - Teacher	0	12	0
Jessica - Guidance Counselor	2	19	20
Angela - Principal	24	5	0

Our Data



Our Discoveries

- Must Be Intentional and Well Planned
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- Most students felt empowered and valued after participating in a Circle
- Most teachers felt the Circle was helpful in moving the class forward through a difficult situation or building a positive classroom environment.
- The Circle is not always a good choice of process.



Where Are We Headed Next

- ◎ Staff Training
- ◎ Create another Wondering
 - If the focus is on SEL, would the need for Restorative and Responsive Circles Diminish?



Bibliography

Balch, Bradley V., Balch, Tonya C. (2019). *Building Great School Counselor-Administrator Teams: A Systematic Approach to Supporting Students, Staff, and the Community*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree Press

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