2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

SECTION 5: THE TRADITIONAL TALKING CIRCLE (2002)

SOCIAL STUDIES, HISTORY

MAIN IDEA

Talking circles are useful when the topic under consideration has no right or wrong answer, or when people need to share feelings. During circle time, people are free to respond however they want as long as they follow specific guidelines.

LEARNING OJECTIVES:

- Students will learn guidelines on how to run a proper talking, healing, and sharing circle.
- Encourage students to practice using the talking, healing, and sharing circles to create a safe environment for people to share their point of view with others.

ACTIVITIES

- 1. Review as a class the **History of the Traditional Talking Circle** with the students.
- 2. Review with the students **Guidelines to Talking**, **Healing**, **and Sharing Circles**.
- 3. As a class have a Talking Circle, see the **Teacher-Run Talking Circle** sheet.
- 4. After you have completed the class Talking Circle and students have learned the proper guidelines to running a talking, healing, and sharing circles divide students into groups of 6. (if you have a small class have a class circle)
- 5. Tell students to talk about anything that they wish or you can give them a topic. Not everyone has to discuss the same thing.
- 6. Review with students **Guiding Thoughts for Our Journey & Building Your New Canoe**, before you have them begin their circle.
- 7. Make sure students are following the guidelines when in their circle.

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Group Participation

2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

HANDOUT

HISTORY OF THE TRADITIONAL TALKING CIRCLE

By, Dan Ennis

The Traditional Talking Circle is the most significant ceremony to the Native people even though it is conducted in an informal setting. The participants sit in a circle and pass a talking stick or an eagle feather from one to the other, always to the left. The holder of the (sacred) object is the one allowed to speak. All other participants must give their full attention to the speaker and not interrupt.

The talking circle is of special importance to our people. As is symbolized by the circle, it is a coming together of people. Unity can be felt within the circle, and this support enables one to speak without fear of criticism or ridicule. The oneness with the others in the circle heals us and gives us peace. This forum allows much more than just the exchange of ideas.

The Traditional Talking Circle is a way of bringing people of all ages together in a quite, respectful manner for the purposes of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing. It can be a very powerful means of bringing some degree of healing to the mind, the heard, the body, and the spirit.

The circle leader begins by passing around sweet grass, cedar, or sage so that the participants may "smudge" themselves (optional in the classroom). Our ancestors believe that theses sacred herbs have a purifying effect upon our total being. "Smudging" is therefore the act of cleansing your mind, body, and spirit.

The Traditionalist opens the Circle with a prayer and proceeds to talk to the people without interruption. All participants are expected to listen respectfully until the speaker is finished. All who sit within the Circle will have the opportunity to express themselves if they choose to or they may simply listen. All speakers around the Circle will be given the same respect and allowed to speak from their hearts without interruption.

Source: http://www.stthomasu.ca/~ahrc/elem6.html

Burton Consulting Services 2013 114

2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

INFORMATION

GUIDELINES FOR TALKING, HEALING AND SHARING CIRCLES

- All comments should be addressed directly to the question of issue, not to comments that
 another participant has made. But negative and positive comments about what anyone else
 in the circle says should be avoided. Just say what you want to say in a positive manner.
 Speak from the heart.
- Only one person speaks at a time. Everyone should be listening in a non-judgmental way to what the speaker is saying. Some groups find it useful to signify in some way who has to floor. Going around the circle systematically is one way to achieve this. Another is to use some object (such as a stone or stick) which the person who is speaking holds and then passes to the next person who has indicated a desire to speak.
- Silence is an acceptable response. No one should be pressured at any time to contribute if they feel reticent to do so. There must be no negative consequences, however subtle, for saying "I pass".
- At the same time, everyone must feel invited to participate. Some mechanisms for ensuring that a few vocal people don't dominate the discussion should be built in. For instance, no one speaks twice until everyone in the circle has been given the opportunity to speak twice. An atmosphere of patient and non-judgmental listening usually helps the shy people to speak out and the louder ones to moderate their participation. Going around the circle in a systematic way, inviting each person to participate simply by mentioning each name in turn can be an effective way to even out participation.
- It is often better to hold talking circles in groups of five to fifteen rather than with a large group, because in smaller groups everyone has time to say what they need to say without feeling pressured by time.
- The group leader facilitates the discussion by acknowledging contributions in a non-judgmental way (that is, by avoiding comments such as "good comment" or "great" which can be seen as making comparisons between different contributions), and by clarifying comments when necessary, (i.e, "If I understand what you're saying, you're...").
- No comments which put down others or oneself is allowed. Some agreed-upon way of signaling the speaker when this is occurring should be established. Self put downs include such comments as, "I don't think anyone will agree with me, but..." or "I'm no very good at..."

Burton Consulting Services 2013 115

2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

INFORMATION continued...

- Speakers should feel free to express themselves in any way that is comfortable: by sharing a personal story, by using examples or metaphors, by analytical statements, etc.
- Some groups have found it useful to encourage participants to focus on consciously sending the speaker loving feelings. In this way listeners are supporting the speaker and not tuning out so they can think about what they will say when it is their turn.

Source: The Sacred Tree Curriculum Guide produced by the Four Worlds International Institute, 1988

Burton Consulting Services 2013

2002 CURRICULUM UPDATE

INFORMATION

GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR OUR JOURNEY

BURING YOUR CANOE

The residential school Survivor and intergenerational support group is for all of us who have felt or feel hurt, powerless, and alone. The support group is an affirmation that no one walks alone who decides to share his or her residential school experiences and intergenerational impacts with others.

The Support Group will move at a comfortable pace, it is not urgent that you plunge immediately into deep problem areas. You will recognize that there are no instant—solutions then you will be able to see the progress you make, and become stronger in dealing with problems you used to run and hide from. Now is your opportunity to face them. One thing is certain: with each meeting, you will come closer to resolving your difficulties, regardless of which area of stress you are addressing.

Support group meetings are held every week at a specific location on the same day or evening. The reason for this structure is to bring balance into our lives that have been broken.

BUILDING YOUR NEW CANOE

Honouring Others

- Look around and see the faces of the others in your group. They are a mirror of your own.
- Listen to what is said by your group members. It is not productive for you to be planning what you will say when it is your turn to speak. You will be surprised by how frequently their words are medicine to you.
- Respect the value of other points of view, each of us are affected differently by the events that happened in our lives.
- Be compassionate, which means to be supportive in each others healing.
- Be courageous, it takes courage to revisit the pain of our experiences.

Source: Walking the Healing Road Resource

Burton Consulting Services 2013 117