

Circling Back to Circle Time

Gretchen Courage and Megan Randlett Amherst Montessori School
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Our workshop **theme** is *Community Building through Leading Circles that Children can Lead Themselves*. We invite you to reflect on your intentions for circle time to make it as engaging, community oriented, and purposeful as you can.

Here are some strategies/routines/activities that we have found successful. They include general tips, our recipe for the parts of the circle, grace & courtesy, general language on the circle, first aid for common stumbling blocks, and resources

21 Tips for Successful Circles

1. Provide opportunities for building community at circle rather than presenting materials
2. Make your circle engaging and worth leaving your work to join your classmates
3. Create consistent and clear patterns that you and the children can remember
4. Explicitly teach every circle rule using three-period lessons
5. Put “circle work” on the shelf so that children can do it with a partner during the work period
6. If you invite children to come to your circle, be the first one there and begin with some kind of movement or song that others can join
7. Keep your circles short; “enough’s as good as a feast”
8. Create a seating plan and allow free choice once the procedures are firmly established
9. Gradual release of responsibility is key: children lead parts of the circle as they are ready
10. Reflect on the difference in the guide’s role at circle time (vs during the work period) AND we are still role models
11. Be fully prepared for every part with all your props/materials to insure a smooth flow
12. Create your circle basket, e.g. I would never go anywhere without these things
13. Teach sign language so that children can participate without interrupting, e.g. “me too... I agree”
14. Use a variety of ways of choosing participants
 - a. Raise hands
 - b. Leader chooses a name stick
 - c. Invite randomly
 - d. Talking stick
15. Include everyone AND have a plan for children who will not be joining circle
16. Children and adults show respect for each other’s words through eye contact, silent listening and connecting
17. Include everyone; make space for the quiet child to share
18. Re-present.... If a child isn’t following a circle guideline, do what you would do with a classroom material such as the sandpaper letters
 - a. Ask yourself these questions
 - i. Did I explicitly teach all the expectations for the circle in an engaging and understandable way?
 - ii. How can I present the rules and procedures again in a new and different way?
 - iii. Could a child teach the rules of the circle to a new student/substitute?
 - b. Offer a small group lesson on circle time expectations
19. You don’t need to make every transition moment into a circle
20. Know the role that circles play in normalizing the child and that individual self regulation comes before self-regulation in a group
21. Make changes during the year phase in a new class vs end of the year
 - a. How do the roles of the children grow through the year and how do we set them up for success?
 - b. At the beginning of the year what are our expectations for the child? And the middle of the year? at the end of the year?

Recipe for the Parts of Circle

- Arrival
- Appetizer
- Main Course
- Dessert
- Departure

Detailed recipe

- Arrival: How will you signal the start? How will children gather?
 - Bell and announcement
 - Music begins and come to circle or walk on the line
 - Rainstick or music box - child walks around
 - Put out circle mats
 - Light a candle
- Appetizer: How will you begin?
 - Welcome song or opening movement that is engaging and fun
 - Preparation of the body
 - Pass a greeting, e.g. handshake, hug, high five
- Main Course: G & C/community building, language development, and/or control of movement
 - Grace and Courtesy
 - Basic role plays as needed
 - Songs and games that teach G & C
 - Language development
 - Songs - Use songs to unite group energy
 - Class songbook
 - Individual songs expand to writing/art activities
 - Nomenclature games using three-period lesson variations
 - Sharing story or object
 - Using a story bag (with props) to tell a story
 - Child shares work with classmates
 - Reading a community building book and focusing on comprehension strategies, e.g.sequence, summarize, characters, setting, predictions, favorite parts, genre
 - Acting out a story
 - Leading a discussion, e.g. listening and noticing commonalities
 - Author's chair for individual or group books
 - Movement games and activities that provide props that can "go on the shelf" after circle
- Dessert: ending on a sweet, positive note
 - Environmental check-in from class custodian or lunch helper who have been working during the circle
 - Community building
 - Gratitudes and appreciations
 - Watering Seeds of Kindness
- Leaving: How will you transition to the next activity in a way that will prepare for success?
 - Whisper names
 - Song or activity
 - Name sticks
 - Tap shoulder with hand or feather

Grace & Courtesy Lessons that Build Community at Circle Time

- How to sit at circle
- What to do with your hands at circle
- How to listen silently and with eye contact
- What to do if you don't get a turn
- Value of each person's voice
- What the circle roles are
- Sign language to communicate, e.g. *Me too.... I agree.... You're too close to me*
- Build stamina
- What the expectations are for a child who does not come to circle
- How to share your work, your story or themed-show and tell at circle
- How to turn and talk
- How to join when the class is walking on the line or around the room

Language on the circle

- Foundation of inclusive community is language
- Accentuate the positive with very specific language
 - "I see that children have their hands in their laps..." vs "Suzy why can't you sit still like Johnny...?"
- Value of Assistant following through with students
- Include everyone
 - To child who seldom participates or says "I don't know" or shrug of shoulders
 - "Can you 'phone a friend' and she can help you!"
 - "Let's see what Juanita notices about _____" After Juanita answers go back to the first child to add on
 - "We really care about your ideas. Can you think about it and we'll come back to you?"
 - Allowing a quieter child to choose one friend to help him or her with the activity
 - Explicit activities for sharing such as magic circle

Circle time First Aid

- If children disagree, cry, fight on circle
- If you need to totally change your plans
- If you see that what's happening before you is not what you expected
- If you need to calm the energy
- If you need to change the tone
- If you need to prepare for a sub
- If you need to ask a child to leave circle/inviting a child to come back
- If a child feels more comfortable watching circle at first

Our Workshop Songs and Activities and How They Illustrate Grace & Courtesy

- Voice modulation
 - *Good Queen Megan*
- Control of movement
 - *When you Hear the Drum, Jump Eight Times*
 - *Dum Dum Duh Dah*
 - *Freeze Dance*
 - Listen and respond
 - *Zoom*
 - *Old Shoes/New Shoes*
 - *Mr. Knickerbocker*
 - *I've Got Peace in my Fingers*
- Control of movement and voice
 - Silence game
 - Breathing chime
 - Yoga poses
- Goes into hum then only motions
 - *Breathing In*
 - *I am a Mountain*
 - *I Got Peace in my Heart*
- Appreciation
 - *Twinkle, Twinkle*

Summary

Thank you for participating in our workshop! Our goal is that you have gained ways to breathe new life into your circle through directly experiencing many activities that build a peaceful, caring community of 3- to 6-year olds. These included grace and courtesy role plays, storytelling and poetry, individual opportunities for children to share with the group, appreciation and gratitude rituals, ways to orchestrate partner activities in the midst of a whole group circle, and songs and games that create a sense of welcome and belonging.

Please get in touch with us and let us know how your circle is going and if we can be of further service.

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