

Peace Circle Notes

Monday, June 8, 2009

Materials

1. A cloth on which to array the varied symbols and objects.
2. Objects (stones, weights, anything of meaning) for participants to hold as truth sticks.
3. Large pipe cleaners (to be manipulated into peace circle representative objects).
4. Paper plates.
5. Name Tents.

Example:



You will notice that questions have text boxes accompanying them. Please write any comments you have in these boxes. I will integrate those comments into the document when you send it back to me.

Question One:

Why are we here? Participants hold object presented to them by the facilitator. They are to speak “truth”. Whomever holds the talking piece has the liberty to speak (or pass). All others are assigned the job or task of listening.

Historic Underpinning

These practices come from Native American/First Nation Sentencing processes for reconciliation of criminal behavior in the tribal community. The Healing Circle provides a common purpose and process for dealing with deeper issues underlying human behaviors. It is believed that by talking we clarify the real issues troubling a community. The metaphor of the Circle can be seen as a “container” which creates a space for investigating social values and norms.

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Question Two:

Think of an important person. *What value do they embody?*

The idea is to write down our thoughts in a single word about that person and the “gift” they have given us in our lives. This word is written on the provided paper plate and presented as a sign for display. The plate is then laid upon the Peace Cloth. The group seeks to define the intrinsic values others bring to any discourse. It also asks the participant to reflect on what they feel when they talk about this person.

Reference was given to Daniel Goleman and [Emotional Intelligence](#).

It was noted that the Dali Lama is fascinated by the amount of energy and effort that western society devotes to emphasizing cultural differences.

It is important to set guidelines for Peace Circles early on. The process works best when we deeply think about and share things that interfere with “safety” and evoke anger and/or fear.

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Thus the next question...

Question Three:

What would you request in order to feel comfortable?

The facilitator then records these “feelings” and observations using newsprint that can easily be displayed about the room being used for the Circle. These observations should remain up for the entire time the Peace Circle operates in that space.

Consensus over this or any issue in a Peace Circle comes when everyone passes the “stick” without speaking. Silence denotes acceptance. As a follow up the facilitator should ask...

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Question Four:

If you request “it” are you willing to “offer” it? Open mind/open heart.

A major initial objective of a Peace Circle can be to examine the meaning of Community. In essence the group is to examine the idea of community. This is done by presenting a story of when community worked well. In other other circles, which come together for other purposes, other topics might go around. “Conflict” is a good point to start if the setting is right. Other areas of inquiry include but are in no way limited to “Intelligence,” “Success,” and “Happiness”. The question is both simple but challenging. We discover that there is not just one unitary definition (experience) of any of these concepts.

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

The question might be...

Question Five:

When you think of community, what comes to mind? Focus on the aspects of that community that made it work well.

The function of the facilitator is to guide the discussion without “brainstorming” recording the information. The Talking piece is passed as often as it needs to be until consensus is reached. Each person talks in turn, each person speaks as needed until their views are known.

Circles are designed to help reveal best practices. Who does them and why. Thus the following question...

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Question Six:

Who was the best teacher/leader you ever had?

In regards to community formation, delve into the relationship between leadership/teaching and function. Thus one can then ask...

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Question Seven:

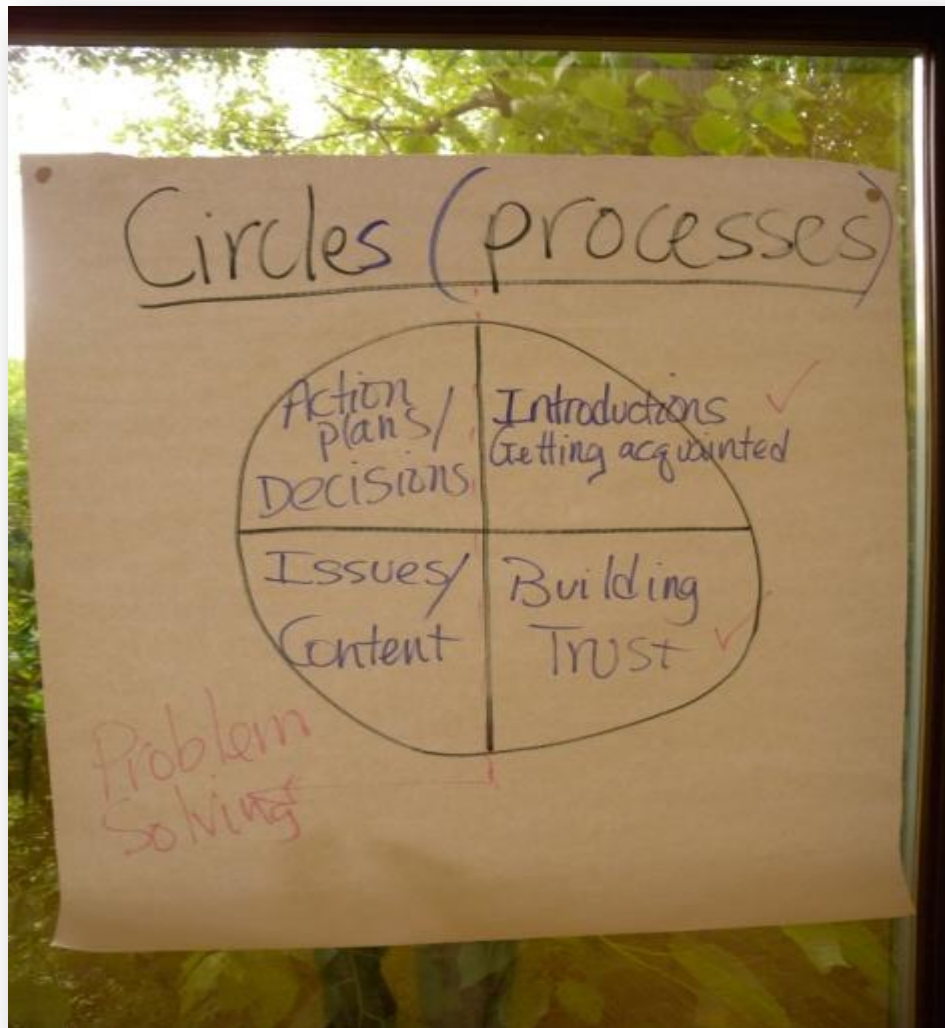
What obstacles impede the formation of community?

Keep in mind that each question presented here represents a set of inquiry that guides the group towards a fulfillment of individual needs and goals. Questioning seeks to revisit the meaning of community by focusing on both the positive and negative aspects of formation provide a vehicle for defining the limits of change available to the group for problem solving.

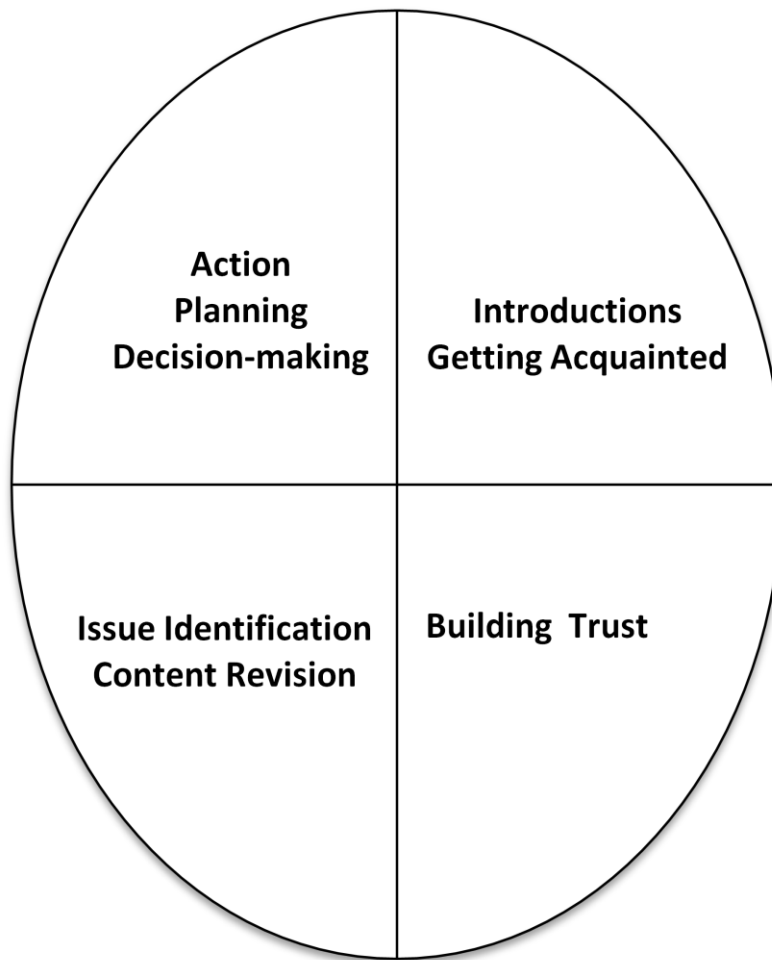
[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Process

The form of the Circle is the binding analogy. The schema is depicted as follows:



Formal Circle



The Left Side of the Circle is typical Western foci on process without fully investigating the underlying values and norms of group's behaviors. The Right side of the Circle is the most important part of the Process. It focuses on why the group is acting the way it is without judging the output of the group.

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

Check In

When a circle meets after a break the facilitator opens by ‘re-introducing’ the space through asking how everyone is doing. This “taking the temperature” tests the participants as to where they are and what they want to do.

Humanizing Question (Question Eight)

How should we move on?

The talking piece used in this session was a Goose Feather. This was chosen because it represents the concept of sharing. In this case sharing is an observation that this is what geese do in flying in formation. The lead goose “breaks wind” and its resulting trailing turbulence provides an eased path for the other geese in the formation. As the lead goose tires it falls back and another goose takes over. That way all geese share the burden of leadership to “move forward” the group to its destination.

The function of the facilitator is to insure that the group is ready to ascend to the next phase of development. Varying the talking stick (listening device) can set the theme for the cyclical process of the Circle.

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

Agenda for the Day

Checking In; Reflections; Centering; Going Deeper, Wider, Higher; What Next

Historic Roots

Anthropologically the roots of Peace Circles are deep and historic. Societies have formed for millennia around campfires and oral traditions developed over time have reinforced those communities through story telling. Modern societies have diminished these traditions but modern science has noted that telling stories activates earlier developed portions of the human mind that are underappreciated in the contemporary context. In this context storytelling:

1. Encourages the teller to “think on their feet”, to spontaneously associate meaning to the mood of the group and enrich the experience of all. We pick the story to tell based on the context of the event.
2. Seeks to present deeper meanings to chosen content. The circle process focuses on moral, ethical, and situational experiences that bind people together.
3. Thus telling the story closes the circle. It is interactive in nature, responsive in process and builds meaning within the group.

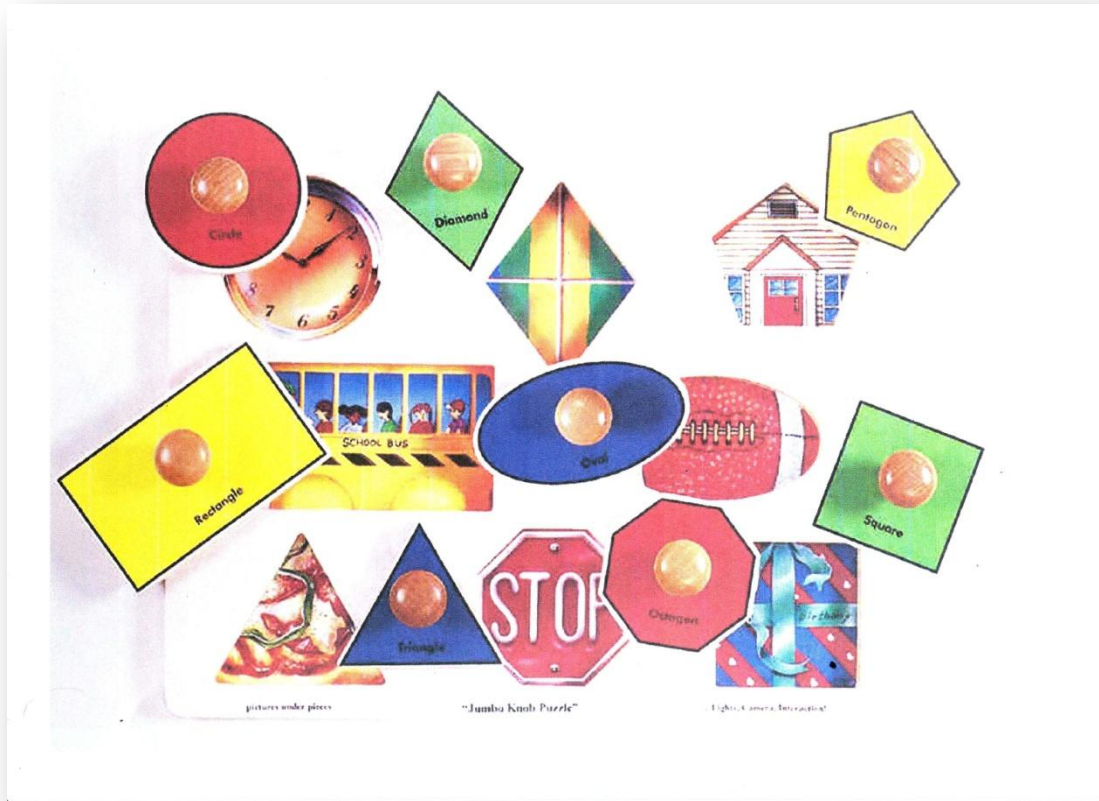
The Question and the process used in denoting appropriate Questions to initiate storytelling is to anchor the group discourse. The Question allows the person to respond however they wish in whatever way brings comfort. The facilitator seeks to create an environment where free commentary is valued and the comments are “listened” to.

The Power of Silence

Providing space both in terms of physical setting and mental attitude is important. Silence invites the opportunity for “surprise”. As noted earlier spontaneously generated meaning requires respect for the other and silence is a means of encouraging shy folks and dense meanings to emerge.

Exercise

An exercise on how Questions frame perceptions was done. The sheet:



The Question: (the attribution for this exercise comes from Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D., in “Foundations of Positive Psychology”. He says he got it from Appreciative Inquiry (Stavros & Torres)).

How many geometric shapes in the Picture? The group focused on counting shapes with little regard for content or meaning. We had little success when asked:

1. What time is on the clock shape?
2. What color was the most left hand shape?
3. How many children do you see on the bus?

Questions are “framing” devices and they circumscribe the perception of reality that we are supposed to take into consideration. Telling us what we are to see requires that we see it. Seeing it requires that we quantify it with the frame we are given. You can manipulate perception thus you can construct reality.

"Frame of Reference: The context, viewpoint, or set of presuppositions or of evaluative criteria within which a person's perception and thinking seem always to occur, and which constrains selectively the course and outcome of these activities" *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (2nd ed: 1988)*

The field of Positive Psychology was raised in the Circle. The concept is defined by the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania as:

[T]he scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The Positive Psychology Center promotes research, training, education, and the dissemination of Positive Psychology. This field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Understanding positive emotions entails the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. Understanding positive individual traits consists of the study of the strengths and virtues, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, and wisdom. Understanding positive institutions entails the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance.

Some of the goals of Positive Psychology are to build a science that supports:

1. Families and schools that allow children to flourish
2. Workplaces that foster satisfaction and high productivity
3. Communities that encourage civic engagement
4. Therapists who identify and nurture their patients' strengths
5. The teaching of Positive Psychology
6. Dissemination of Positive Psychology interventions in organizations & communities

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

A video of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on the concept is available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DC3VIFk2N0> He is the author of Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience and is a leading thinker in the field of Positive Psychology.

Friday June 12, 2009

Agenda: Check In; Questions and Reflections; Purposing; Closing the Circle.

The use of Story Telling was brought up and answered by noting that telling stories face-2-face binds groups in deep ways. They suspend direction and open the “evaluative” mind to new possibilities. The Story is contained in the Circle and as a safe place this environment humanizes the process of inquiry into each stories meaning.

Quote: What do I think of **Western civilization**? I think it would be a very good idea. Mohandas Gandhi ...www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/mohandasga141784.html

It was also brought up that in the culture of South Africa embodied by Desmond Tutu that there is no “individual” there is only the idea that we are people because of our relationship with another. Tutu speaks on this at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftjdDOFTzBk>

A further definition is:

“Africans have this thing called UBUNTU. It is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging”.

— Desmond Tutu
Archbishop Emeritus

<http://www.tutufoundationuk.org/ubuntu.html>

It was also observed that taking the time to do the Circle creates an intentional set of behaviors that can be adjusted to meet the needs of any setting. Presenting something “unusual” can upset an existing (stuck) paradigm. Investigating whose “truth” matters and realizing that each of us speaks from our own “truth” enriches the Circle process. If you believe that you can’t do something then you can’t. Moving beyond this self limiting mindset is an important function of the Circle. Fixed beliefs can be challenged by asking:

1. What happened?
2. What was the impact?
3. How do we repair the harm?

Discussion also centered on the work of the [International Institute of Restorative Justice Practices](#). A concern was also voiced over you’re a Circle group contends with death and a person leaving. The critical question that needs to be addressed is: Who was this person and what did they bring to the group. This is akin to the grieving process. We also discussed the anxiety that is generated by change and the inherent need many people have to “solve” it without addressing the causes of it.

The IRP Questions

Restorative Questions I

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking at the time?
3. What have you thought about since?
4. Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
5. What do you think you need to do to make things right?

Restorative Questions II

1. What did you think when you realized what happened?
2. What impact has this incident had on you and others?
3. What has been the hardest thing for you?
4. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Closing

The Circle was closed by two exercises: The Written Hug and the Circle Clap.

General Comments

[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

The Group





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June 2009

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e-newsletter, graduate programs, current research: International Institute for Restorative Practices
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