



Preparing Adults to Work with Students

By Lynne Lang



Restoration Matters

Successful Student Circles Depend on Adults

Issues we face with school bullying are primarily a microcosm of a greater adult issue.

Students enter the world we create for them. In order for circles to be successful, adults are responsible for becoming educated and aware of the significance of their role in creating the environment in which meaningful circles happen.

After training over 100 Catholic schools from 2013 -2018, evidence has shown that those with the deepest change are committed to ongoing professional development of staff and parents, and an expectation that adults at school will hold meaningful adult circles at least one time monthly.

Background

All trained schools were given the option of using the VBRD™ Interactive Training Series for Adults. This specifically designed to provide a staff with (10) 5-8 minute videos with a reflection question after each segment. Their written response was the topic of their brief circle discussion.



Commitment to staff circles is essential to successful implementation with students. Pictured here: Sister Thea Bowman School, East Saint Louis, Illinois, being trained by IIRP trainer, Lynne Lang

Method

One person was selected to be the facilitator for the staff. The facilitator reviewed the video and reflection in advance, then staff attending the monthly meeting wrote their reflections in their VBRD™ Interactive Participant Guide. After the circle discussion, staff went on to their meeting agenda. While there was no formal research, the process of certifying schools revealed the significance of schools that started with the sequential series that explains the roles/responsibilities/possibilities for adults at school and at home, and for students. After one year, schools either went on with moderate buy-in by staff, little buy-in, or significantly high levels of buy-in for implementing VBRD™.

Results

Principals in VBRD™ schools using the Interactive Training Series reported satisfaction and the staff in these schools continued circles as a scheduled part of their monthly and bi-weekly staff meetings after one year. The facilitators typically continued to plan for meaningful staff circles after the series ended. In these same schools, the staff showed commitment to the overall building implementation and to weekly circles with students.

"I loved the series. It really got us off to a great start with implementation. Not all schools know where to begin. But by having our staff do these circles, we began to understand how to best serve our students." *Principal*

"I recommend the Interactive Training Series. It helped our school get started." *Middle School Teacher*

Interpretations

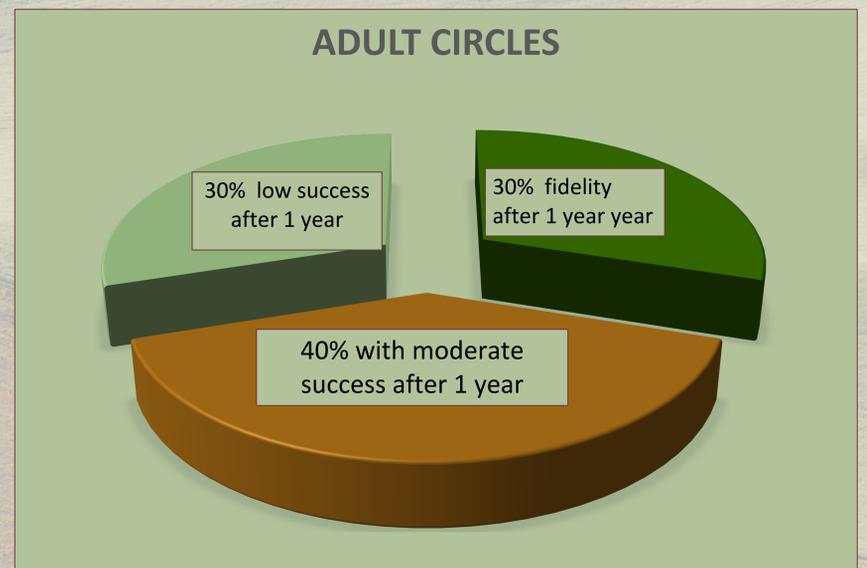
Teachers gained better working understanding of restorative practices with a consistent, systematic approach that allowed them to experience the process interactively as a group.

The importance of a sequential process of explaining the history and significance of restorative processes and very practical implementation steps as part of ongoing orientation for adults at school can promote positive outcomes for students.

Recommendations

After initial training of schools, follow up with a systemic model for getting staff acclimated to circle processes prior to working with students. When staff are well trained and experience the self awareness, self-discovery and relationship management skills that can occur in circles, they are more capable of leading students with confidence in the circle process. This motivates them to succeed.

Schools can benefit from having a resource for adult circles that can be then used for working with students. A series of circle sessions that breaks down the definition of restorative practices and the meaning of the circle process can help students to understand the purpose of the circle and the significance of having a restorative school. In addition, students can build trust in the process and learn to lead their own circles and understand the just process of restorative circles.



After one year of implementation, school success of implementation was measured according to:

1. adult engagement in staff circles
2. frequency of student circles
3. student satisfaction with restorative processes
4. adult understanding of restorative relationships through interaction, encouragement, positivity, support for circles

References

- Lang, L., 2014. *VBRD™ Interactive training series*. Imagine That Enterprises, St. Louis, MO.
- Boyes-Watson, C., Pranis, K. 2015. *Circle forward: building a restorative school community*. Living Justice Press. St. Paul, MN.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to IIRP for supporting this VBRD™ body of work.

