



This month's Circle Tale comes to us from Kathy Jourdain. Kathy is a Process Artist with Chrysalis Strategies Inc. Thank you, Kathy!

Circle Tale, March 2008

The Circle that Wouldn't Close

I've had the pleasure of working with circle practice for a number of years now. I have seen some remarkable things and have had some powerful experiences in circle. The experience I am most compelled to write about is the story of the circle that wouldn't close.

We have been using circle with a 10-month leadership development program where it is the primary hosting methodology and it is used in all of its various formats.

It was the first year of this program. The facilitation team of five had not worked together before – so we were also learning about each other as we designed and delivered this brand new program.

Early in the program issues around diversity began to emerge. The facilitation team held very different views of how to handle the questions that were coming up or even if they should be focused on as that might grow them into an issue that might not otherwise be there.

The participants in this program worked full time and met each month for learning days or retreats. Three months in, we were in the middle of our second retreat. The questions around diversity and the resultant mix of emotions were growing. We needed to do something.

We decided to convene a circle one evening. In retrospect, there were things we could have done better. For instance, we could have developed a better question. We tried to go around the issue instead of tackle it directly.

The circle started out okay as the talking piece began to go around the room. About a third of the way around the first time, the first really contentious comments were spoken. As the piece traveled around the circle you could feel the emotional charge of the circle heating up. It may have been the first time I really witnessed shadow in circle without, at that time, being able to name it as such.

As the piece traveled around the circle a third time, it was becoming increasingly clear there would be no resolution or real common ground established that night. The facilitation team was feeling the need to close the circle. One member of the team asked another member to close the circle with claps. It didn't happen. Another person was asked to sing a chant that had come into this group but that request was denied. People eventually began to get up and the circle faded into small group discussions and one-on-one dialogs. These discussions were pertinent to the topic and began to help some people open up their understanding of the myriad of issues and perspectives alive in the room.

It wasn't until the next day as we did our closing circle for the retreat that it was brought to our attention that the circle the previous day had never been closed. The person who noted it, couldn't believe she was actually bowing to the power and wisdom of circle. The issue wasn't closed, the circle wasn't meant to close. It would have been artificial if it had.

We continued on into the year with more focus on developing understanding of diversity in our group and in our community. The discussion impacted my own development and opened my understanding and advocacy of diversity. And it has left me in awe of the wisdom inherent in circle well beyond anything that our team and our group brought to it.

If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.