



This month's story comes from Sandy MacIver and Jean Cockell, colleagues in Vancouver, BC, Canada, who share the impact of circle on their doctoral studies and cohort learners group. Thank you to all, named and unnamed, participants in this circle for sharing your experiences.

Circle Tale #45, November 2003

The Impact of Circle on Doctoral Studies

Experiences of circle as told by the EdD 2001 Doctorate in Leadership and Policy Program, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, BC.

Starting in July 2001, twelve people in cohort for a doctoral program at UBC began looking for ways to support each other through what has traditionally been a lonely and stressful process.

Beginning in the fall of 2001, we began using circle to talk about readings and then in spring 2002 we decided to support the "whole person" and talk about whatever was going on in our lives that impacted our studies. This deepened our circle process dramatically.

Then in January 2003, we took another evolutionary leap. In a class that focused on preparation for our oral comprehensive exams we convinced the co-instructors to incorporate circle right into the class itself, and invited them to join us. The circle positively impacted everything we did and after successfully completing our orals, we re-dedicated ourselves to supporting each other in circle at our ongoing monthly meetings.

The comments below are gathered from an email check-in and are used with permission.

"I have found the EdD circle a place to speak freely about what's going on in my life as a whole, the struggles and joys. It's wonderful to be listened to and to listen to others so completely. I love the sense of connection to and support from the group. The EdD circle encourages me to keep going with this very difficult doctoral journey."

"Circle has provided a place for me to try out new ideas and vocalize thoughts that are at times simmering away on the backburner of my consciousness... not a place that gets to rise to the surface very often, at least not in a vocal way. I find that once I bring voice to the thought it then makes it into my everyday in a serendipitous way, without pressure, creating a synergy that I have not experienced in any other type of group..."

"The experience of the circle facilitates a sense of openness and ongoing growth. In many ways the circle is based on the strength of relationships and yet strengthens relationships as it develops. For me the power of the growing relationships within the circle has been one of the most meaningful aspects of the EdD program."

"The cohort circle has been very a powerful experience as we create a learning community that honours our combined learning and experience. It has been a place to be heard and to listen and to learn and to expose the raw places that academic life brings. For me the most powerful part of the circle is the fact that the circle has created for us a place of caring that honours each person and their experience."

"Circles for me are places where I can fool around with my theories of the world before I take them public, and get away with it. What makes them different from other dialogical contexts is the sense of forgiveness they engender among the co-participants. I have found it helpful not to be challenged or distracted until I have completed whatever thought it was I was attempting to articulate."



"The circle is the place where I can truly be myself. It is safe; it challenges my head; and it fills my heart. I feel more able to go out into the world to do 'good'."

"There are many powerful aspects to the circle. One is the enormous power of everyone's leadership experience. The circle is a gathering of veteran leaders with a broad diversity of experience within different leadership milieu. The safe supportive environment of open enquiry has a huge impact on my learning and the beginning of an understanding of the complexities of leadership. The gestalt is very powerful."

"The circle has provided a space that is different from the usual group formats that are task-oriented. It offered each an opportunity to speak personally about whatever was relevant in academics, work or any of the multiple areas in which we are involved. This personal and multiple dimension allowed for connection in our shared struggles, the percolating of ideas as we listened without interruption and the possibility to see beyond the mundane and the complex, to listen to the real person and appreciate the diversity of thought."

"Chiefly our cohort circle has given me both intimacy and connection - the importance of connection and intimacy in a environment where you can easily fall adrift and get caught up in the impersonal nature of many academic pursuits; the power of connection and intimacy in its many forms -- appreciation, empathy and support chief amongst them -- as we tell and hear our truths, the raw stories of our lives that go on despite our best efforts to put them aside for three or four years."

"Our cohort Circle is a place where there is respect, patience, understanding, support, and friendship in an atmosphere of honesty and forthrightness that is not always evident in other settings. Our Circle also has its protocols and I like the idea of being able to speak without constant interruption and/or people not really listening, but rather waiting for their turn to say something because they like to listen to themselves speak. I like the discussion that flows after we have gone around once, because it is much more meaningful in the context that has been established by the once around the Circle. I also like the idea of closure to our sessions at the end by going around once more."

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

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*