

ED 6463 - Rethinking Educational Engagement

Final Project  
*Introduction to RJE  
through circle pedagogy in kindergarten French immersion*

Created by: Angela Eastman  
April 2022

***Table of Contents***

Introduction	2
Keeper/facilitator of the circle or “le chef du cercle”	2
Circle guidelines/values or “En cercle je...”	3
Centerpiece or “Le centre du cercle”	4
Talking piece or “objet pour parler”	5
Seating or “les sièges”	7
Opening round or “premier tour”	7
Middle round or “deuxième tour”	8
Closing round or “dernier tour”	11
References	12

## ***Introduction***

This final project introduces talking circles and restorative justice (RJ) in education to kindergarten French immersion teachers. Here, teachers will be introduced to the various components of a talking circle and will be supplied with ideas for setting up and implementing a circle routine with young students. My hope is that this project will inspire kindergarten French immersion teachers to introduce RJ practices to their students and that they will benefit from this information on setting up circle practices within their classrooms. Developmentally, from the time kindergarten students enter and leave kindergarten, they range from 4-6 years old. While their stamina may be extremely short at first, and their French language skills may not allow them to enter the circle with much prior knowledge, the benefits from interacting with their friends and teachers in circle can be transformative. Teachers will find that students will end up learning social skills, language skills and many academic skills through their circle experience. This guide will hopefully encourage educators of younger students to feel empowered to introduce circles in their classrooms and feel it possible to begin implementing these practices. It is important to remember that “there is no single way to integrate Circles within the school community: each community should incorporate the Circle in its own way to meet its own unique needs” (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, p. 3).

## ***Keeper/facilitator of the circle or “le chef du cercle”***

The facilitator of the circle has an important role. This person is responsible for helping the group develop their circle values, and helps create an open and honest space where the group feels comfortable to share with each other. In facilitating the circle, an individual will choose the talking piece, and encourage proper use of the talking piece for the duration of the circle. The facilitator will create guiding questions for each round, and keep everything flowing. The facilitator cares about everyone within the circle, and does not impose views on the group or persuade members of the group in their thinking, they are an equal part of the circle. Building relationships is key to being in circle, and the facilitator has an important role in creating a safe space where students can get to know each other before more sensitive issues can potentially be discussed.

Often, for our purposes as educators, we assume the role of the facilitator. Especially with young students in kindergarten French immersion. At this age, they still need much guidance, support and modeling of the French language. That being said, with enough repetition and as teachers practice circle routines more and more, teachers may wish to transfer the responsibility to a student of asking a question that they have been practicing to the group.

### **Circle guidelines/values or “En cercle je...”**

Within the circle process, developing circle values together is an essential part of being in circle. Building these group values is deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions and is included in key teachings common among Indigenous communities. Here, participants will develop values that nurture good relationships and allow participants to connect to their core self, and the core self of those around them. It is important to note that these values are never to be imposed on the circle by the facilitator, but rather discussed and created while engaging with all members who will be participating. Circle guidelines are created after the group develops which values are important to them, and after considering what it is everyone may need from each other.

In kindergarten, a conversation about values will look very different. The language used is very basic and can include discussing what we need from our friends when we are sharing things with each other (in circle). Class circle values will look different depending on who is creating them, however, remember to create these by incorporating ideas and words your students come up with. Students may tell the facilitator words in English, and may need help translating to French. Ultimately, creating the values in French is important. Below are examples of some sample guidelines for kindergarten French immersion. Keeping it between 3-5 guidelines is plenty, because it is important that the students are not overwhelmed and are able to understand each one.

*En cercle... j'écoute avec mon cœur.*

*En cercle... je ne parle pas quand mon ami(e) parle.*

*En cercle... je suis bien assis.*


*En cercle... je suis gentil(le).*

*En cercle... je peux passer si je veux.*

Symbols often help younger students quickly recognize what the French words mean.

Sometimes your guidelines may be as simple as:

*Je regarde.* 

*J'écoute.* 

*Je respect.* 

All students should also know that being a part of the circle is an invitation. One is not obligated to take part in circle activities and there may be a time when challenges arise where

students wish to disrupt the circle, leave at any moment, or simply refuse to take part. In a situation such as this, it will be helpful for students to know they can enter and exit the circle if they need. That being said, brainstorming guidelines/expectations for both in and out of the circle can also be valuable in these situations. If students are simply not able to take part in the circle, one guideline could include remaining quiet and not disruptive for those who choose to stay in circle. Creating guidelines for students both in and out of the circle, will be helpful for students who simply can not participate for whatever reason to know what the expectation is for them. Eventually, the goal is for everyone to feel safe and included and wish to participate in circle time.

### ***Centerpiece or “Le centre du cercle”***

The centerpiece is a valuable focal point that is usually placed on the floor in the center of the circle during your circle practices. Anything placed in the center of the circle should be explained by the facilitator. The centerpiece can contain items, cloths, blankets or anything which represents a shared vision and encourages inclusion for everyone participating. The centerpiece should also reinforce the class values/guidelines that you have created as a group.

A valuable centerpiece for kindergarten, is a centerpiece that each of the students have a hand in creating. This forms a sense of belonging and purpose, where the students can take ownership of something that they helped construct. This creation can take many forms depending on the interests and abilities of your students. Two ideas and examples of possible centerpieces are included below.

***Idea #1:*** Using a piece of bristol board as the base, each student (and classroom staff) will trace their hand, write their name, decorate their hands and then cut them out. Once cut out, place their hands in a circle, glue them onto the bristol board and laminate (if you wish).



**Idea #2:** Using a piece of bristol board as the base, each student will receive a blank flower petal template to write their name, decorate and cut out. Once all petals of students (and classroom staff) are cut out, you will arrange them in a circle to form the shape of a flower. In the center of the flower you can either write the circle guidelines or “Notre fleur d’amitié”.



It is valuable to include the circle guidelines that your class has created somewhere in the center of the circle. It is a nice visual so that teachers and students can come back, revisit and reflect on the centerpiece and guidelines if there are members who are having difficulty following them on any given day.

### ***Talking piece or “objet pour parler”***

The talking piece is an object that regulates who is talking, and when, during the circle dialogue. The talking piece begins with the facilitator, and is passed around the circle from person to person where only the person holding the talking piece is permitted to speak. The facilitator is the only person who may speak without the talking piece, but should only do so when absolutely necessary. (In kindergarten, teachers as facilitators may find themselves talking quite a bit at first, but will notice less and less interruptions as the students increase their

stamina.) While holding the talking piece, the speaker is to be able to share without being interrupted. It also allows for members of the circle to know who will be speaking, and listen to them with an open mind, without thinking about what they will have to say when it is their turn to speak. It is important to share that what you discuss in the circle is private and that nothing shared within the circle is shared outside of the circle. The talking piece is a tool that encourages equality, allowing everyone the opportunity to speak. That being said, it is important to share with the students that they don't have to share if they don't want to, and they may simply pass on the talking piece to the next person when it is their turn. Participants should still ensure that they listen carefully to each person who has the talking piece. If time allows, the facilitator may choose to go around the circle again, giving those who passed the first time an opportunity to share if they have changed their mind. Or if time is limited, the circle facilitator may just ask those directly who passed if they wish to now share. Again, always allowing them to pass a second time if they wish.

When introducing talking pieces to students, teachers may choose to start out with an object that is special to them. By doing so, teachers are introducing, modeling and building a sense of respect for them and things that are important to them. As your circles continue, teachers may choose to switch to using something that the students can relate to and are familiar with. For example, this can include a stuffed animal that the students recognize from one of their classroom stories. Having any stuffed animal is nice for younger students because it allows them to share a hug with it if need be when it is their turn to share. They are also able to connect with the stuffy, because it has a name and they've often read about it outside of the circle.



*\*Note: Once the students begin to realize the value and the respect that they need to show the talking piece, teachers may choose to begin to assign a student per day/circle who may bring in their own talking pieces to share with their friends. Students may even wish to share why it is important to them.*

### ***Seating or “les sièges”***

It is extremely important to sit everyone in a circle. The arrangement allows for all participants to see each other and be on the same level. All members are held accountable because they can be seen by everyone. The circle also creates a feeling of connectedness.

It is valuable to let the students choose their spot in the circle to allow them to feel comfortable and demonstrate free choice. There may be a situation where certain students are not able to sit next to each other and follow the circle guidelines, in this case, it may be a good idea to guide certain students to a more appropriate spot in the circle. Another valuable note is that everyone in the circle is seen on an equal level. That means, participants can all sit on the floor, or can all sit on chairs, or cushions. Equality is important, so it is important that everyone does the same thing. In special circumstances, a participant may have to sit in a chair while everyone else is on the floor, or sit on a specific type of chair due to mobility issues or an exceptionality. This includes the teacher(s).

### ***Opening round or “premier tour”***

Circles use opening and closing rounds to mark the beginning and end of circle time. The opening can allow an opportunity for participants to become present in the moment, where a closing can allow for reflection.

When individuals begin facilitating talking circles for the first time, especially with kindergarten aged students, participants may barely get through the opening round of the circle without stopping many, many times and needing a lot of guidance and encouragement from the facilitator. Take your time and do not be discouraged! Circle practices is all about building up the stamina with the students. Practice with them each day, using consistent language and basic routines.

After teachers have created values and guidelines with their students, they are ready to focus on just an opening question. When creating the first opening round, it is wise to choose one simple French question and focus on that particular question each day for many weeks. Teachers will find that focusing on the same question and the same vocabulary every day, will allow the students to build more and more stamina so that they may be able to make it all the way around the circle without someone interrupting or sharing something completely off topic. The first round and first question for example could be: “Comment ça-va?” The facilitator may model possible responses including: “Ça va bien”, “Ça va mal” or “Ça va comme-ci comme-ça”.

When the students are familiar with “Comment ça va” as an opening question, and with following the values and routines of the circle, teachers can begin to change the opening question. It is important to note that, the students may still only have enough stamina to make it through one question. They will still need the question and possible answers modeled and help from the facilitator with translating their answers to French. Once they tell you their answer in English, you repeat it in French, and then they repeat it in French after you.

Other possible opening questions in French can include but are not limited to:

- Quel est ton animal préféré? Mon animal préféré est \_\_\_\_\_.  
(*What's your favorite animal?*)
- Est-ce que tu aimes \_\_\_\_\_? Oui, j'aime \_\_\_\_\_ **OR** Non, je n'aime pas \_\_\_\_\_.  
(*Do you like \_\_\_\_\_?*)
- Quel âge as-tu? J'ai \_\_\_\_\_ ans. (*How old are you?*)
- Quelle est ta couleur préférée? Ma couleur préférée est \_\_\_\_\_. (*What is your favorite color?*)
- Comment t'appelles-tu? Je m'appelle \_\_\_\_\_. (*What is your name?*)
- Comment te sens-tu aujourd'hui? Je me sens \_\_\_\_\_. (*How are you feeling today?*)

This can also be accomplished by simply asking a reflection like: give a thumbs up (pouce en air) or a thumbs down (pouce en bas) with how their day is going so far.

In the opening round, teachers may choose to incorporate a quick mindful moment (pleine conscience). This is an opportunity to bring everyone into the present moment and to release calmer energy for circle time. Mindful moments can include the ringing of a bell to signify a moment of silence/stillness, taking a big, slow deep breathe, or listening to calming/relaxing music before the facilitator begins the opening round.

### ***Second round or “deuxième tour”***

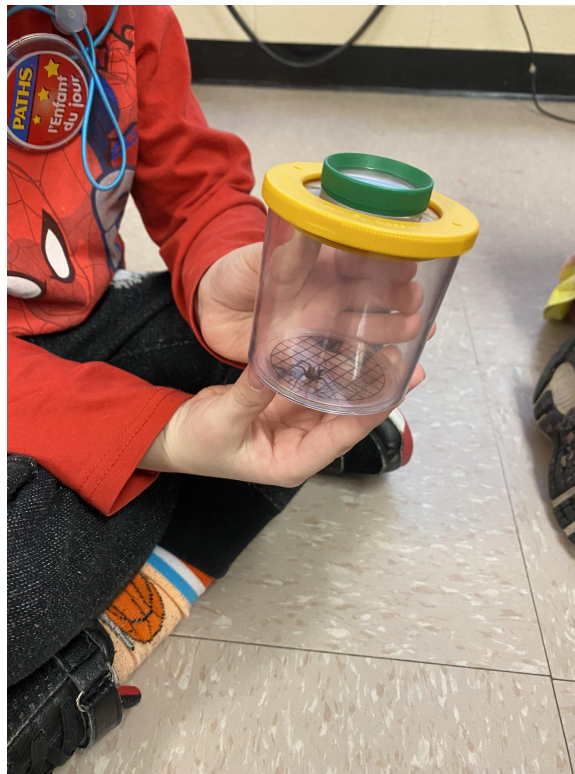
After a lot of practice with one round, the teacher may feel that the students have enough stamina for an opening question and a second question/game. If the opening question was one that required students to sit still, then for the second (deuxième) round it may be a good idea to include more of a movement. Some examples include:

- **Compliment round** - While standing, the students take turns giving each other a compliment and then sitting down. This allows for every one in the circle to receive a compliment from someone. They could say “J'aime \_\_\_\_\_” (ton t-shirt, ton chandail, etc). (*I like your shirt, sweater, etc.*)

- **Name throw** - While standing, take the talking piece, say “Bonjour \_\_\_\_\_” and then gently toss them the piece (this works with a stuffy). Once you toss it, you sit down so that everyone gets a turn.
- **Name roll** - While sitting, everyone opens their legs in a V shape. They say “Bonjour \_\_\_\_\_, comment ça-va?” and then gently rolls someone a ball. When they roll it they cross their legs so that everyone has a turn to ask and answer.
- **Switch places** - The facilitator says “change de place avec quelqu’un qui \_\_\_\_\_” (*Switch places with someone who \_\_\_\_\_*). The answer to this can include any vocabulary that the students are familiar with (les vêtements, les couleurs, etc.) Students take one step forward, made eye contact with a classmate and quietly switched places with them in the circle.

During this second round, you can also relate to any other curriculum area.

**Example #1: Science** - Your students may find and catch a spider in their “creature peeper”. This is a great opportunity for everyone to take turns making observations and asking questions about what we see. Modeled questions can include: “je me demande \_\_\_\_\_” (*I wonder...*) or “je vois \_\_\_\_\_” (*I see \_\_\_\_\_*).



**Example #2: Math** - Teachers can also use circles to ask students open ended math questions in an topic area they are currently covering. Facilitators can cover a math outcome by asking a question like: “Quels deux numéros font \_\_\_\_\_?” (*Which two numbers make \_\_\_\_\_*)? Each student may show their understanding by giving any two numbers to answer the question.

**Example #3: Art/Health** - Teachers can ask the question: “Quel(le) est un(e) bon(ne) ami(e)?” (*What does a good friend look like?*) Students can share their answers in circle and the facilitator can jot down each one. After, the students can decorate/draw an example of their choosing on strips of paper that are all the colors of the rainbow. When finished, the class can attach their strips (and drawings) together to create a rainbow friendship chain (notre chaîne d’amitié). After, it can be displayed within the classroom.



***Closing round or “dernier tour”***

Kindergarten students may never build up enough stamina to do a closing round in addition to an opening and a middle round. It is valuable to note possible closing rounds that can be used to reflect on the circle practices of the day. (It is also important to note that the closing does not need to happen directly after the previous rounds of the circle, and may be able to happen at other times throughout the day depending on the class schedule.)

Some examples of a possible closing round include:

- Comment avons-nous fait aujourd’hui? Utilisez vos doigts pour donner 1-5/10. (*Using your fingers, reflect on how you think today’s circle went from 1-5/10?*)
- Qu’est-ce qu’on peut changer pour le prochain cercle? (*What could we have done differently this circle time/what can we change for next time?*)
- Qu’est-ce qu’on a bien fait? (*What did we do well?*)
- Sur quel est-ce qu’on peut travailler? (*What can we work on?*)

## References

Boyes-Watson, C. & Kay Pranis (2015). *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*. Living Justice Press.

Evans, K., & Vaandering, D. (2016). *The little book of restorative justice in education: Fostering responsibility, healing, and hope in schools*.

Graveline, F. R. (2003). Talking Circle As Pedagogy. In *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. Blackwood, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

*Relationships First*. RJ Education NL. (2012). <https://www.relationshipsfirstnl.com/>

\*All photos attached throughout this document are ones that I have taken in my own classroom over the years and are my own.