Skills for Success Curriculum Resource Cover Page

Organization

College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC)

Resource Title and Description (for Supporting Underrepresented Groups theme)

Building Classroom Inclusion and Community through Talking Circles: A Resource for Literacy and Basic Skills Educators

Fostering inclusion and building community in the classroom are positively correlated with student participation, persistence, satisfaction, mental and physical health, belonging, and general student welfare. As society emerges from the social isolation induced by COVID-19 pandemic measures and as diversity in the upgrading classroom increases, relationships become even more important to foster an inclusive classroom community for all classroom stakeholders, especially under-represented populations. Literacy and Basic Skills educators can promote inclusivity, community, socioemotional skills, and reconciliation in their classrooms by incorporating sharing circles in their andragogies of care.

OALCF Alignment

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A -Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	3
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	3
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B4. Express oneself creatively	N/A
Competency E - Manage Learning	N/A	N/A
Competency F - Engage with Others	N/A	N/A

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

☒ Employment ☒ Postsecondary
☒ Apprenticeship ☒ Independence
☒ Secondary School Credit

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

☒ Adaptability ☐ Numeracy
☒ Collaboration ☒ Problem Solving
☒ Communication ☐ Reading
☒ Creativity and innovation ☐ Writing
☐ Digital

Notes:

Since this is a resource for educators, the OALCF does not apply in the same way that they do for learners. However, it should be noted that the use of talking circles is appropriate for learners at all OALCF levels.

The opinions expressed in this document are the opinions of the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading. The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by any recommendations contained in this document.

BUILDING CLASSROOM INCLUSION & COMMUNITY THROUGH TALKING CIRCLES

A RESOURCE FOR LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS (LBS) EDUCATORS

CHRISTOPHER PRECHOTKO | MARCH 2023

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ANDRAGOGY – an educator's approach to teaching adults, including style, delivery, curricula, assessment, feedback, classroom management, and classroom climate.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE – "the classroom environment, the social climate, the emotional and the physical aspects of the classroom" (Classroom Climate, 2022).

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY – "a space in which students and instructors are committed to a shared learning goal and achieve learning through frequent collaboration and social interaction" (Columbia CTL, n.d., para. 4).

CLASSROOM DIVERSITY – A classroom composed of students of varying individual diversities partly affected by social categories, such as race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic strata. Consequently, each student brings a unique lived experience and its related perspective to the classroom that contributes to a diversity of thought and opinion.

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM – an environment where students and teachers all feel a sense of respect for and connection to each other (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2019), which consists of a classroom "culture that strives for equity and embraces, respects, accepts and values difference" (Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, 2022, para. 4).

INDIVIDUAL DIVERSITY – "the variety of unique dimensions, qualities and characteristics" that each individual possesses (Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, 2022, para. 3). Everyone possesses a unique combination of objective lived experience and subjective reality partly influenced by their membership within various social categories.

INTERSECTIONALITY – "the network of connections between social categories such as race, class and gender, especially when this may result in additional disadvantage or discrimination" (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

LONELINESS – "a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that a person has, compared with what a person wants. It is an unwelcome feeling of lacking companionship" (Angus Reid Institute, 2019, para. 9).

MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS – "groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions" (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2022).

SOCIAL CAPITAL – "the quality of one's social networks, such as trust, efficacy, diversity, and inclusivity; the structure of one's networks, which involve size, power, relations, and modes of communication; the transactions that occur within one's networks, such as sharing support and knowledge; and the types of networks, which include bonding, bridging and linking types" (Taylor & Trumpower, 2021, p. 12, as cited in Taylor et al., 2012).

SOCIAL INTEGRATION – defined as positive student-student relationships outside the classroom and participation in extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975).

SOCIAL ISOLATION – "the number and frequency of interpersonal connections a person has" (Angus Reid Institute, 2019, para. 5).

RECONCILIATION – "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between [Indigenous] and non-[Indigenous] peoples in this country" (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, p. 6).

SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM – "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9)

SOCIOEMOTIONAL SKILLS – "'Social and emotional skills' refer to the abilities to regulate one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d., p. 4) within a social context.

INTRODUCTION

Building community in a classroom, developing inclusive classroom climates, and increasing social integration are positively correlated with increased student participation, persistence, satisfaction, belonging, and overall student welfare. Furthermore, the social isolation and resulting loneliness induced by a lack of community, inclusion, and social integration in an educational institution not only impact student participation and persistence but also affect the mental and physical health of an individual. Thus, relationships are essential to many students' successful educational participation and completion.

Unfortunately, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation and loneliness increased in Canada, and individuals with low income and low educational attainment were most likely to experience social isolation and loneliness. In addition, the chances of experiencing these circumstances increased if individuals belonged to minority groups, such as visible minorities, 2SLBGTQIA+, and Indigenous Peoples (Angus Reid Institute, 2019). Furthermore, individuals in marginalized groups are at a higher risk of being exposed to potential trauma-causing events and developing trauma (Cotter, 2022; Fusco et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Please see the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) *Trauma-Informed Andragogy* resource for more information on trauma.

On a global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the concerning trends of increasing social isolation and loneliness (Buecker & Horstmann, 2022). Those who struggled with personal finances and mental health during the pandemic were more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation than those who did not struggle with personal finances and mental health (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). Poverty and impaired mental health directly influence one another and, as a consequence, contribute to an increased likelihood of experiencing future disparate outcomes. If this positive feedback loop isn't interrupted, these conditions only worsen. Since marginalized populations are at increased risk of experiencing disparate outcomes (Baah et al., 2019; Ngui et al., 2010), many marginalized individuals are, therefore, at risk of continued social isolation and loneliness post-pandemic. Despite this bleak outlook, social

institutions have the power to make a meaningful difference in the social lives and the related educational outcomes of the vulnerable.

As Ontario emerges from the isolation prescribed by the pandemic measures and as diversities in LBS and upgrading classrooms increase, essential factors, like fostering a sense of community, increasing inclusion, increasing social integration, and reducing social isolation and loneliness become even more important to increase learner participation, persistence, and retention, especially for under-represented and marginalized populations. Fortunately, to realize these ends, LBS educators can promote essential factors associated with learner participation, persistence, and retention by incorporating talking circles into their pedagogies. Importantly, talking circles also contribute to a more inclusive classroom climate for Indigenous individuals while travelling further down the path toward reconciliation.

This resource will provide adult educators with valuable information about the potential for talking circles to foster community, inclusion, socioemotional skills, and reconciliation in the classroom. The following points will be discussed in this resource: the importance of fostering inclusion and community in increasingly diverse classrooms, the relevant background information and benefits of talking circles, the directions pertaining to how to guide a simple talking circle, and the relevant considerations and concerns regarding the incorporation of talking circles into adult upgrading classrooms.

THEORETICAL & EMPIRICAL BASES FOR FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CLASSROOM

Adult learners can experience situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to educational participation (Cross, 1981; Sloane-Seal, 2011; Patterson, 2018). For example, the dispositional barrier of minimal social trust, impedes the educational participation of individuals with lower levels of educational attainment (Patterson, 2018). While proclivity toward mistrust negatively correlates with educational participation, it can also impede the social integration of a student into an educational institution.

Relatedly, student experience with the social systems of adult educational institutions influences persistence (Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 1975). More specifically, if student integration is unsuccessful due to unpleasant social experiences or lack thereof, the likelihood of student persistence declines as does the likelihood of student retention.

Conversely, research has consistently found a positive connection between adult student persistence and supportive, high-quality teacher-student relationships in adult education contexts (Dwyer, 2015; Sloane-Seale, 2011). More specifically, these responsive student-teacher relationships and the opportunity to form new friendships and support networks are vital to the persistence and retention of adult basic education students (Prechotko & Kirby, 2023; Zacharakis et al., 2011) who experience more barriers to education than adult learners with higher educational attainment. Furthermore, these relationships contribute to the interdependent senses of inclusion and community in the LBS/Academic Upgrading classroom which are also associated with student participation, persistence, and retention.

IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

In addition to situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to participating in education, culturally diverse and marginalized learners can also experience cultural and systemic barriers to educational participation (McCann,1995, as cited in Sloane-Seal, 2011). In fact, there is a diversity of barriers to education faced by each individual within a population of adult learners (Windisch, 2016), and disadvantaged learners face

compounded barriers to educational completion (Petty & Thomas, 2014, as cited in Kerka, 2005).

To note, it is more than likely that most adult basic education (ABE) learners are from one or more marginalized groups, which means that ABE students can experience multiple intersectionalities regarding race, sex, gender, ability, and class. Thus, the number of intersectionalities an LBS learner experiences can directly contribute to the number and degree of challenges to participation and persistence in education that a particular learner may encounter.

Personal connections are important to student learning experiences, inclusion, and community building (Townsend & Delves, 2009; University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). As discussed earlier in this resource, barriers to participation and persistence in education can be mitigated through social integration. Educators can facilitate positive student to student relationships in the classroom with the intent that these relationships will provide students with the opportunity to improve the quality and number of connections within their social networks both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, student-teacher relationships are important for all students, but for those students at high risk of stopping or dropping out, meaningful connections with teachers and staff are critical to student persistence (Schreiner et al., 2011).

Culturally responsive teaching can counteract cultural, institutional, and systemic barriers to student participation and persistence (Gay, 2018). In diverse classrooms, educators can foster a sense of inclusion and the development of social networks by utilizing culturally inclusive collaborative learning activities (Taylor & Trumpower, 2014). The diversity of knowledge elicited from student lived experiences during participation in collaborative learning activities can enhance the meaning of learning and engender inclusion (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2019). More specifically, student collaboration in a safe classroom community of adult learners can foster personal growth outcomes, like practicing literacy, numeracy and social skills, developing self-directed learning skills, forming relationships, and building and strengthening social networks; such conditions can also contribute to a classroom climate that contributes to identity transformation and the acquisition of social capital (Taylor & Trumpower, 2021).

From the perspective of reconciliation, incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, including languages, histories, cultures, and pedagogies into classroom delivery and curricula are valuable methods, as well as recommended Calls to Action, to foster reconciliation in the classroom and educational institution (Pidgeon, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). Transforming institutional cultures and educational spaces and providing an inclusive environment for Indigenous students can be achieved by tending to the Indigenization of all levels of education (Pidgeon, 2016).

For educators, including LBS educators, relationships are the key to inclusion and community in the classroom. Attending to student inclusion is an important contributor to a sense of community in the classroom and vice versa. Developing an inclusive classroom community can increase the social integration of students and decrease individual loneliness while also improving the participation, persistence, and retention of marginalized and high-risk learners. However, providing students with the opportunity to form personal connections is one component required to learn social skills and develop social networks. Providing students with the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for effective interpersonal communication and conflict management are also contingent upon developing the personal skills of emotional regulation and empathy. The remainder of this resource will discuss the benefits of the culturally inclusive collaborative learning activity of talking circles. Through the development of socioemotional skills, talking circles can instill and develop both a climate of inclusion and a sense of community in the classroom.

SHARING THROUGH TALKING

An effective relationship-focused method to encourage socioemotional development is the sharing circle (Schumacher, 2014), which involves the telling of personal stories in a social setting (Tachine et al., 2016; Wemigwans, 2021). Sharing circles help students to develop relationships with themselves and others. In Indigenous communities, everyone has a voice, and everyone has value (Biesele, 2008; Porter, 2006). These inclusive principles of Indigenous cultures can be learned and embodied in the classroom

practice of talking circles where power should be shared equally among the participants of the circle.

In contrast to the sacred ceremonial tradition of sharing circles that often include blessings, prayers, and sacred ceremonial objects, talking circles are less formal, but they still retain the values of democracy, equality, and belonging for everyone involved in the practice (Alberta Education, 2005). Educators can utilize talking circles in lieu of sharing circles while retaining the socioemotional, inclusive, and community building benefits of sharing circles. Discussed next are the empirically founded socioemotional benefits of sharing circles.

SOCIOEMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF SHARING CIRCLES

The routine incorporation of sharing circles into classroom activity has many personal and social benefits. As an example, participating in sharing circles has been found to positively affect emotional regulation, such as anger management (Schumacher, 2014). In sharing circles, participants can be encouraged to share their perspectives, which can be dependent on a particular topic of discussion, including their emotions relative to the topic (Alberta Education, 2005; Wemigwans, 2021). Importantly, by sharing their own feelings in sharing circles, educators can model behavior that encourages learners to also share their feelings.

In a relaxed and safe environment where a safe environment is one where individual diversity is respected, if there is no specific topic of conversation for a particular sharing circle, educators can cue students to share their personal stories by asking them about how the fire is burning within themselves (Pitawanakwat, 2012). From an Anishinaabe teaching, this metaphorical reference to one's internal state relates to the emotions founded on an individual's daily experiences. Through the act of regularly reflecting on their fire, an individual can learn to nurture their inner self, acknowledge their daily stresses, and in doing so, mitigate the negative impacts of stress on psychological and emotional health.

When sharing personal stories, students are given the opportunity to connect their experiences with their emotions which enables them to participate in a form of self-

authorship, which has been shown to empower individuals through an increase in self-awareness and self-confidence (Jackson & Trede, 2020). Because they learn to become responsible and accountable for their own personal narratives, students can learn what educational, social, and personal barriers are within their purview to change or outside their immediate purview to change, such as structural racism. These personal stories or narratives, also known as 'dibaajimowinan' in Anishinaabe culture, are methods of creating meaning, which are essential to individual health, and they are invaluable sources of knowledge; within these stories are personal truths and insights (Simpson, 2011) that students can access to understand their pasts, navigate their daily lives, and plan for their futures.

By learning to communicate their emotions, students also learn to acknowledge and reflect on their feelings, which are critical skills necessary for regulating one's emotions (Herwig et al., 2010). The ability to regulate emotion, associated with emotional stability, is correlated with increased physical and mental health based on both contemporary Western research (Song et al., 2015; Tianquiang et al., 2014; Maté & Maté, 2022) and traditional Indigenous knowledge (Pitawanakwat, 2012). It is important to reiterate, situational barriers, such as poor health, are inversely correlated with student participation (Cross, 1981) and persistence (Sloane-Seale, 2011), so improved physical and mental health resulting from the emotional benefits of sharing circle participation can increase both student participation and persistence.

From the practices of speaking with, listening to, and supporting others, students also learn to be empathetic (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Schumacher, 2014). Empathy is an individual's ability to see and feel from another person's perspective; empathy can be an innate skill for some, but it can also be developed with intentional practice in others (Riess, 2017). Empathy is developed in sharing circles by listening to others communicate their personal stories, respecting these stories, and relating to the content and feelings that were shared. This individual capability of empathizing with others enables the broader goals of social inclusion and community cohesion in diverse settings as more people in a community develop the skill and capacity to relate to each other — "Empathy can be a vital means of social inclusion acting to extend the circle of moral concern to others" (Leake, 2022, p. 212).

INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY THROUGH SHARING CIRCLES

As already discussed, collaborative learning activities, such as sharing and talking circles, have the potential to develop social networks inside and outside the classroom by increasing social integration, inclusion, and a sense of community in the classroom. Activities that promote social inclusion oblige students to listen to often neglected, silenced, or dismissed voices (Leake, 2022). Moreover, the empathy fostered in sharing circles contributes to deeper relationships within the classroom collective.

In sharing circles, participants are invited to open their hearts and minds to the perspectives and feelings of one another, which fosters a sense of connection and understanding among the participants (Alberta Education, 2005). Additionally, a sense of responsibility to and dependence on others is fostered due to the social support inherent in the practice of sharing circles (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Tachine et al., 2016). Students learn through experience that their individual and collective presences during this practice makes the circle stronger (Wemigwans, 2021). Through repeated interactions during sharing circles or other forms of collaborative learning activities, "the continuing extension of empathy widens the circle of social inclusion as the perspectives and feelings of more and diverse groups are given due consideration" (Leake, 2022, p. 223).

This process can greatly increase the sense of community for all participants in the classroom while teaching students important culturally and morally relevant knowledges and skills that can germinate a climate of reconciliation. Such a climate exists when students are given the opportunity to interact ethically with Indigenous Peoples, strive for transformational change, and learn the virtues of humility, reciprocity, anti-racism, and two-eyed seeing (Littlechild et al., 2021).

All students, regardless of their identities, deserve and expect to be treated with respect and provided with meaningful inclusion in the classroom. In the utilization of talking circles in the classroom, educators employ culturally relevant teaching methods that can develop empathy, inclusion, community, social integration, and reciprocal relationships of trust which all have positive effects inside and outside the classroom. These positive effects contribute to the added beneficial effects of increasing student

retention, participation, and persistence for marginalized and underrepresented students in education.

DIRECTIONS FOR LBS EDUCATORS TO GUIDE A TALKING CIRCLE

The purpose of a talking circle will determine how it is conducted. The specific directions in this resource will solely focus on the utilization of a talking circle to check-in at the beginning of class or check-out toward the end of class. LBS educators who are interested in employing talking circles for different purposes, such as the cocreation of curriculum related knowledge, are encouraged to review the resources in the Additional Resources section of this publication for further direction. As well, if LBS educators are interested in learning how to incorporate the more traditional and ceremonial aspects of sharing circles into their talking circles, the additional resources are a good place to start, but educators are also encouraged to build relationships with colleagues who are responsible for Indigenous supports at their educational institution.

For LBS educators, a talking circle can be a simple and relatively easy collaborative activity to plan and conduct. One does not need an excessive duration of time or quantity of space to facilitate one. In fact, within an online class, relatively little physical space is required for a virtual talking circle (for detailed directions pertaining to conducting a virtual talking circle, please read the *Talking Circles* webpage published by First Nations Pedagogy in the Additional Resources section). In addition to the individual and collective benefits of talking circles that were discussed earlier, talking circles provide educators the chance to learn more about their students, including their perspectives, emotions, assets, needs, barriers, fears, and troubles. This information as it relates to each student in the class, provides an educator with the valuable knowledge necessary for responsive teacher-student relationships, which have been found to increase the retention and persistence of students at high-risk of stopping-out or dropping out of education. For example, this knowledge allows educators to make timely referrals to institutional and community supports.

The cautions and directions, below, required to conduct a simple classroom talking circle have been adapted from the Learn Alberta's *Talking Circle: Fact Sheet (n.d.)* and Alberta Education's publication, *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners* (2005, p. 163). In the Appendix, educators can find an adapted talking circle preparation sheet for the purpose of a classroom check-in or check-out activity.

CAUTIONS

a) There is no hierarchy in the circle.
b) Consider the individual needs of the participants to determine the purpose of the talking circle.
c) Respect the different comfort zones of the participants. If a student chooses not to speak this is an acceptable form of participation.
d) Ensure the participants feel safe. Ensure that participants know that whatever is discussed in the circle, remains in the circle. Personal information shared in the circle is not to be communicated outside the circle without the express permission of the person who shared.
e) The perspectives shared in the circle are to be valued and respected.
f) Educators may choose to be mindful of regional protocols in the design of a circle. For example, the direction participants enter a circle may differ depending on whose indigenous territory the activity is occurring in, such as Anishinaabe or Haudenosaunee traditional lands (Pass the Feather, n.d.)

DIRECTIONS

1. Have participants sit in a circle, which symbolizes completeness. A rough circle will do when there are spatial constraints.
2. If this is the first talking circle the class will participate in, ask participants to partake in the development of the guidelines for a healthy circle conversation in the classroom. Co-developing the rules may achieve more "buy-in" from the participants. Below are a few common guidelines for talking circles:
    o Everyone's presence and contribution are of equal importance and value. Power is shared equally in the circle.

- State what you feel or believe starting with "I-statements," e.g., "I feel."
- All comments are addressed directly to the question or the issue to be discussed during the talk. Participants are directed not to address the comments another person has made. To emphasize this point, communicate to participants that both negative and positive comments directly related to what anyone else has to say should be avoided.

3. Educators may want to review the guidelines at the beginning of each circle talk.

4. An everyday object such as a rock or pencil can be used to indicate who has the right, at any given time, to speak in the circle. This object is also known as a talking piece.

5. When the object is placed in someone's hands, it is that person's turn to share his or her thoughts, without interruption. If participants disregard the guidelines during the circle, gently remind them to respect the speaker and the circle (Winters, n.d.). Only one person speaks at a time.

6. The object is then passed to the next person in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction until everyone in the circle has had the chance to contribute. The direction of the circle depends on the regional protocols for the land the circle is on. "If you are in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) territory, your circle will most likely go counter-clockwise with the moon. If you are in Anishinaabek territory, your circle will most likely go clockwise with the sun" (Pass the Feather, n.d., step. 4)

7. While a participant who is holding the object is speaking, others have the responsibility to listen.

8. Everyone listens in a non-judgmental way to the speaker.

9. If a participant chooses not to share, one does not have to give reason for this decision. Silence is an acceptable response. Participants shall not respond negatively to a participant's decision to pass whether the participant responds in silence or with the phrase, "I pass."

10. Speakers should feel safe and free to express themselves in a way that is comfortable, such as by sharing a story, a personal experience, by using examples or metaphors, etc.

11. When the circle has finished its talk, the participants can be invited to exit the circle.

CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCERNS FOR LITERACY & BASIC SKILLS (LBS) /ACADEMIC UPGRADING CLASSROOMS

An inclusive classroom community is important to adult education and adult basic education students, including lbs and academic upgrading (au) learners in Ontario. Not only do lbs/au educators derive the potential individual and collective learner benefits by incorporating talking circles into their pedagogies, but those educators also provide themselves with the opportunity to become better acquainted with their students. This more personal degree of familiarity allows educators to identify potential barriers to the individual participation and persistence of each student in the class more readily. This knowledge enables educators to be more responsive in addressing student barriers and referring students to appropriate institutional and community supports. As a result, unfavourable outcomes, like student stop-out and drop-out, can be more effectively mitigated.

However, those educators who consider utilizing talking circles in their classrooms may have concerns in doing so. The method of delivery in lbs classrooms can vary by institution. One service provider may offer independent study while another provider may offer instructor-led delivery. Regardless of the delivery format, educators may share similar concerns. These concerns may be related to culture, time, and space.

First, educators may be concerned with risks of cultural appropriation or cultural insensitivity should they choose to utilize talking circles in their classes. These are relevant concerns that should be considered with care. According to the truth and reconciliation commission's 62nd call to action (2015b), postsecondary educational institutions in Canada will, eventually, have the responsibility to provide educators with the knowledge necessary to incorporate indigenous ways into their pedagogies. However, until the required government funding for the development and provision of such educational opportunities is provided, adult educators are encouraged to learn more about talking circles (see Additional Resources) and build relationships with the Indigenous support services at their respective institutions. For those educators who

work at satellite campuses, it may be advisable to supplement relationships with Indigenous support services at the main campus with relevant community supports. Educators who have not participated in any form of circle work in the past should endeavour to participate in a few circles before proceeding with talking circles in their classrooms.

Next, educators may be concerned with spatial constraints. Indeed, the number of students in a classroom in conjunction with the size and layout of the classroom will determine the suitability of the activity in any given location. Educators should use their judgement to determine the suitability of utilizing talking circles in their classes. In the instance of high student to teacher ratios, student attendance fluctuates on any given day, so there are times when educators can anticipate an opportunity to guide a talking circle when student numbers tend to be lower. Of course, the inclusion of talking circles could have the effect of increasing attendance, a positive outcome despite size constraints.

Finally, time constraints may be another relevant concern. The number of students in the class along with the time allocated for the class will determine both the topic and the maximum amount of time each student can speak. LBS educators concerned with fostering an inclusive classroom community are required to balance the demands of delivering curricula in a timely manner while providing the necessary space for culturally inclusive activities, such as talking circles. This may mean that educators only have the time to guide a talking circle once per week per class and the topic may be a simple check-in or check-out, but this could make all the difference in retaining marginalized students who may be struggling to remain in school.

In the end, it is up to the LBS educator to determine how to best manage the time and space they are allocated for delivery. Given the alignment of culturally inclusive collaborative activities with relevant Ontario Adult (OALCF) Curriculum Framework competencies and the Skills for Success model, LBS educators have good reason to appeal to administrators for institutional support to deliver talking circles in their classrooms. Furthermore, the reconciliatory aspect of talking circles gives more weight to support their inclusion in the classroom. In addition, educators could develop an allyship with relevant institutional Indigenous services to advocate for the time and

space needed to embed culturally inclusive collaborative activities in the classroom. Therefore, LBS service providers and any associated educational institutions are indeed financially and morally incentivized to provide educators with the resources necessary to foster an inclusive classroom community.

CONCLUSION

The content in this resource discussed the individual and collective benefits of incorporating talking circles in the adult upgrading classroom, and it outlined directions on how to do so. Through talking circles, adult educators can help to achieve the social justice goals of educational institutions, such as the full inclusion of students from a diversity of groups.

Student inclusion begins in the classroom, and the benefits of inclusion are noticeable; with practice, an inclusive classroom community can be developed, and it can positively impact the retention of marginalized and underrepresented students. Consequently, educational institutions may need to reconsider the application of market values, such as efficiency and competition, and their relevance to education. There are problematic limits to the democratic inclusiveness of these values as they are presently conceived. When one considers the moral reasons to foster climates that enable and nurture the relationships necessary for inclusive classrooms, it is apparent that justice requires a more humanistic approach to education. For students who are at greatest risk of loneliness and isolation in society, participating in an educational environment that takes a multi-faceted, meaningful approach to alleviating the loneliness induced by social isolation can make all the difference in improving their present circumstances and future outcomes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TALKING CIRCLES PROTOCOL – this is an excerpt from the text *Contemporary Issues.* The text was developed for educators to teach Indigenous history, culture, and issues in Alberta. The text is part of an Aboriginal studies series, and these resources were reviewed by Elders from across Alberta:

https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/indigenous_pedagogy/documents/talking_circles_protocol.pdf

FIRST NATIONS PEDAGOGY ONLINE – this resource provides instructions pertaining to how to conduct a virtual talking circle:

http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html

TALKING CIRCLE FACT SHEET – this resource is an excerpt from *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners.* It is an easy-to-use fact sheet that gives simple instructions on how to conduct a talking circle:

https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/talkingtogether/facilitated_talking_circle_fact_sheet.html

SHARING AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CIRCLES – developed by a Haudenosaunee business, this resource provides some historical and cultural background about talking circles. The difference between sharing circles and restorative justice circles is briefly discussed:

https://passthefeather.ca/sharing-circles/?v=e4b09f3f8402

USING TALKING CIRCLES IN THE CLASSROOM – developed by a community college educator in the United States, this resource is comprehensive. It discusses how to plan and conduct talking circles for different topics and purposes in the classroom. The resource includes a detailed talking circle preparation sheet:

https://www.heartland.edu/documents/idc/talkingcircleclassroom.pdf

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APPENDIX

This talking circle preparation sheet for a simple classroom check-in or check-out was adapted from Alaina Winters' *Using Talking Circles in the classroom* (n.d., p. 8)*. For a sheet suitable for more complex talking circle purposes, please see this reference.

TALKING CIRCLE PREP SHEET

Title/Topic of Circle: Course:

Preparation

Time:

Circle purpose:

Preparations ahead of time (e.g., Does the classroom require rearranging for the activity to occur)?:

Talking piece:

Other items to bring:

Are there any materials, activities, videos, or articles you want participants to engage before the circle?

Circle Details

Opening/Introduction or Review of Rules:

Introduce the Talking piece:

Check-in/Check-out question:

Closing: