

Culture COUNTS

What is Old is New Again

By Randi Downs

The school year is winding down, making this a perfect time to look back and reflect on the relationships that were built within your classroom and school.

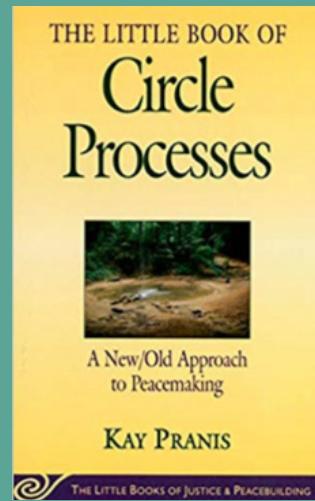
Connectivity is what drives a healthy culture. It's simple, really — all people want to feel a part of something, and when we gather in a circle and allow all voices to be heard, we are laying the groundwork for deep connection. So, once you breathe and rest and rejuvenate, begin to look forward. How will you use circles from day one to talk, understand, and support? Talking circles invite all voices to be heard. Understanding circles allows us to provide meaning around instructional concepts and essential questions. Support circles announce to your students that the class — the whole class — is there for them, whether they are grappling with a difficult concept or just needing to know they are not alone.

Which types of circles will you plan for when the new school year announces itself? A helpful resource is "The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking" by Kay Pranis. It's a quick read but full of helpful tips around circle planning and implementation.

Have a beautiful summer. It has been my absolute pleasure learning and growing with all of you.



Pictured: Auto students from Matthew McGivney's class share their ideas and collaborate, while standing in a circle at the Thompson Road Campus.



In every one
of us there is a
deep desire to
connect to others
in a good way.

— Judge Barry Stuart,
Yukon, Canada

Talk a Walk Around the Henry Building



Turn this page over to
see what is going on in
CTE classrooms at Henry.

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Mindfulness in the Classroom – and Life

By Dan Hesler and Tess Tracy

During our staff day in March, elementary special education staff from our center-based buildings had the opportunity to participate in the Mindful Classroom training by Jason Butler. Jason is a mindfulness specialist for the Austin Independent School District who recently published the book, “Mindful Classrooms — Daily 5-minute Practices to Support Social-Emotional Learning.” In his book, Jason shared the following concepts: the mindful classroom; the physiology of the brain and the benefits of meditation; the application of mindfulness to the classroom/school setting. Since the training, many staff have started to integrate more mindfulness practices into their programs and have seen great results!

Tess Tracy, a teaching assistant in our STRIDES programs, describes the impact mindfulness training has had with the students she works with. She says the impact of mindfulness prompted her to take a different approach as she and her class entered the last few months of the school year.

“Introducing mindfulness has not only impacted our students in a positive way, but our staff as well,” she said. “We do yoga every morning as a classroom, work on different breathing techniques, and have implemented some forms of peaceful meditation. We think the main success in our classroom is that we’ve allowed the practice to be a choice. After giving our students the choice to participate, we have seen an increase in the number of times students are using these skills independently. We are excited to immerse our class and program more into mindfulness in the 2019-2020 school year.”

Useful Websites

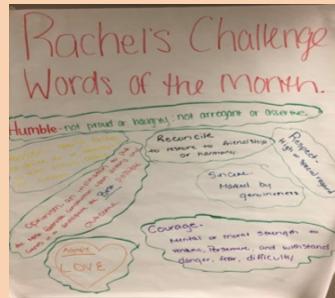
- Calm.com/schools *
- Stopbreaththink.com/educators *
- Mindfulschools.org

*Free subscription for educators

On My ‘Ghost Walk’ at Thompson Road

By Randi Downs

In Ron Ritchhart’s book, “Creating Cultures of Thinking,” he describes a protocol called “Ghost Walks,” where teachers walk through the learning space without students present, to see what evidence exists that tells the story of a culture. So I took a ghost walk around our Career and Technical Education Center at Thompson Road, and this is what I saw:



We may ask ourselves the following: How well do these artifacts reflect our culture? What do we value? What message are we putting out to our community?

Try it. When the students leave today, take a Ghost Walk and see what the walls tell you about the culture of your school.