

# Using the Native American Talking Circle: Experiential learning on ethnic and cultural diversity of Southern California

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**Abstract:** *Talking Circles are a method of group communication used by Native American tribes (such as the Iroquois and Cherokee) to settle disputes, educate, tell stories and make decisions. When considering the practice in the context of social work with groups, there are distinctions that are uniquely Native American in philosophy and culture. Talking circles have gained in popularity as a groupwork method. A talking circle was adapted as teaching tool to help students explore ethnic diversity in a racially and ethnically diverse California university. The exercise was introduced in a MSW Human Behavior (HBSE) course; the session focused on ethnocentrism and racism. Analysis of student reflections indicated participants felt safe to express themselves in the circle. Participants described both emotional and intellectual connections to peers. Through the sharing of personal stories, experiences and challenges, participants had a chance to both teach and learn about each other's ethnic heritage and struggles.*

**Keywords:** *groups; talking circle; ethnic diversity; culture; groupwork; group work*

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## **Introduction**

The origins of the talking circle can be directly traced to Native Americans who inhabited the great plains of North America. The circles have been used by various tribes to settle disputes and make decisions, as well as to educate young tribal members (Fleischhacker, Vu, Ries, & McPhail, 2011). Group members sit in a circle and talk about a topic following some basic rules. Throughout the circle, a feather or other object is passed from member to member (Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG & Sullivan, 2003). Only the member who holds the object is allowed to speak without interruption; the other members listen respectfully in a round-robin process (Dylan, 2003). Seating arrangements in talking circles resemble that of most social work groups. All members sit at the same level and in plain view of one another in a non-hierarchical fashion (Shulman, 2008). Similar to mutual aid groups, the power of the talking circle group resides within the group, not with an individual member (Dylan, 2003; Middleman & Goldberg Wood, 1990). If a member wishes not to speak, the object can be passed to the next member (AASWG & Sullivan, 2003). Native Americans are group oriented, they value the group collective. The experience of participating in a talking circle is considered sacred (AASWG & Sullivan, 2003; Wolf & Rickard, 2003)

Using this structural form, talking circles have become an increasingly popular modality of groupwork. Research on the use of talking circles, although limited, has unanimously revealed its effectiveness (Becker, Affonso, Blue Horse Beard, 2006; Momper, Delva, & Reed, 2011; Wilbur, Wilbur, Garrett, & Yuhas, 2001; Wolf & Rickard, 2003). Participants of talking circles have reported feeling more connected with other group members. Circles enhance the participation of every group member, thus promoting egalitarianism (Wolf & Rickard, 2003). No member is better, more worthy or more privileged, but is unique. Talking circles create a sense of community and closeness so that participants feel comfortable, supported and safe disclosing their feelings (Struthers et al, 2003; Wolf & Rickard, 2003). Engendering greater feelings of interrelatedness, talking circles promote a greater depth in the level of interaction among participants (Becker, Affonso, & Blue Horse Beard, 2006).

Studies within the Native American population have shown that the talking circle is an efficacious model for instruction (Granillo, Renger, Wakelee, & Burgess, 2010; Hodge, Fredericks, & Rodriguez, 1996; Struthers, Hodge, Geishirt-Cantrell, De Cora, 2003). For example, Granillo et al (2010) used the talking circle to instruct paraprofessionals and community health representatives about tribal community health. The facilitators wanted a culturally appropriate mode of delivery that would be well received and could improve teaching. The sample included 85 Native American participants. During the training, members broke into small groups of 5 to 7 participants and each group had their own talking circle based on various public health topics. Overall participant feedback about the smaller circles was gleaned from a larger talking circle held at the end of the training, to assess the value of the training. Participants from the project explained how the talking circle was a culturally appropriate and effective way to train tribal public health workers. The experience enhanced their understanding and comprehension of the material. As each person verbalized his or her experiences, other participants could relate to what had been articulated. The talking circle allowed the participants to learn from individualized experiences and understand how the new public health tools could work from multiple perspectives (Granillo et al, 2010).

In another study, Struthers et al (2003) used the talking circle to instruct Native American individuals at risk for Type 2 Diabetes. The authors conducted an educational intervention on two American Indian reservations. The sample included 147 individuals who participated in a series of 12 talking circles. The circles engendered a safe environment for participants to share their stories, experiences, sadness, grief and hope in the wake of coping with diabetes. This structure provided the avenue that allowed participants not only to understand but also to internalize and integrate the material into their lives. Members stressed that it was necessary to search for culturally appropriate ways to prevent this health condition which was challenging communities, families, individuals and the overall existence of the culture (Struthers et al, 2003).

Triplett and Hunter (2005) used a weekly talking circle over the course of a year to teach school children (grades K through 2) and to create community in the classroom. Initially, the use of the talking

circle was considered as a way to help children better understand Native American culture, however the practice evolved and became a weekly event in the classroom over time. They found that the talking circles were effective for community building, developing empathy and problem solving. The authors also emphasized that the circle was a catalyst for teaching students topics such as diversity and literacy.

Among social workers, cultural competency and cultural sensitivity is considered essential to practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008), indicates that cultural competence and social diversity is an ethical responsibility to clients. Given the value that the social work profession places on culture and diversity, it is important for current and future social workers to understand the impact of their own and others' ethnicity and culture on their practice. The purpose of this study was to utilize the talking circle as a method to teach and learn first-hand about ethnic diversity among social work students.

Challenging oppression and ethnocentrism can be addressed in groupwork practice (Wickham, Pelech & Basso, 2009). Research suggests that groupwork's best practices allow group members to teach others within a group setting about differences and how culture and identity develop (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2008; Wickham et al, 2009). In social work, groupwork can be closely aligned with the core philosophy of anti-oppressive practice by acknowledging and exploring diversity with group members. Group facilitators should recognize how power, privilege and racism can affect interactions in the group setting. They can promote an atmosphere of respect for diversity. Equal-status contacts rather than contacts with a hierarchy (inferior to superior), are more likely to reduce prejudices (Landazabal, 2002; Schaefer, 2010).

## **Method**

The study took place in a university located in a mid-sized city in southern California with tremendous racial diversity. The campus is described as a Hispanic-serving institution and at the undergraduate level, 36.6% of students identify as Latino/Latina (California State University, Long Beach [CSULB], n.d.). This demographic shifts a bit within the graduate student population, 24.4% of students are Latino/

Latina, 18% are Asian-American/Pacific Islander, 29.2% are Caucasian, 10.2% are visa, non-citizen and 5% are African-American (CSULB, n.d.). Twenty, first-year female MSW students who were taking a human development class in this southern California university participated in this talking circle. This class was offered in their first semester of the program.

The talking circle approach was chosen particularly to expand the learning experience for students during the week the class was going to discuss the topic of ethnocentrism. Didactic learning does not effectively address the stereotypes that can be present in the classroom. However, increased contact between majority and minority groups that are involuntary can become tension-laden (Landazabal, 2002; Schaefer, 2010). On the other hand, face-to-face, closer relationships with peers in a classroom setting can address issues of diversity in a way that cannot be gleaned from a textbook or presented in a lecture. Prejudice can be reduced in situations where individuals are placed in environments where they share characteristics in non-racial, non-ethnic matters (for example, coworkers or classmates). Equal-status contacts rather than contacts with a hierarchy (inferior to superior), are more likely to reduce prejudices (Landazabal, 2002; Schaefer, 2010).

The talking circle took place in the 8th week of a 16-week course. The focus of discussion for that week was on one's ethnicity and the experience of living in a culturally diverse and urban environment (in the greater Los Angeles area). The focus of the class discussion prior to the talking circle was centered on how members felt about fitting into the larger American culture and society. They talked about the challenges they faced each day. The instructor shared that instead of using a didactic approach for the material, the class would be experiential and would be using a talking circle. In preparation for the class, the students read materials about the use of talking circles, cultural diversity and reviewed the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), especially with regards to nondiscrimination. The professor who led the group began by discussing his personal journey, which involved exploring identity issues relating to culture, family of origin and the diversity of living in southern California after relocating from another country. The discussion in the talking circle then began with a prompt for the students about how society perceives a group member and how she identifies herself. As the talking circle developed, participants

elaborated on how damaging and hurtful stereotypes based on physical appearance have been challenging for them.

The facilitation of the group followed the procedures used in the talking circle format. The person who held the feather in the group was the person who held the floor. In the group, the feather was passed from person to person. The circle lasted for two and the half hours and the group made three full rounds of participation. Each member had the opportunity to speak at each turn, with members being respectful of time limitation. Participants did not have the opportunity to comment on each others' experience immediately, but only when the feather came around to them. Each person spent no more than 5 minutes talking about their experience during each round. A few group members chose not to speak in the first round. In the subsequent rounds, almost all participants spoke as they grew more comfortable in the setting. New ideas were articulated by some group members, which in turn, stimulated others to think about parallel situations and this helped the conversation to evolve. The members of the group engaged in the conversation via the talking circle format. When a member received the talking feather, she could choose to respond to the beginning prompt, discuss a related topic, or build upon the conversation by responding to another member's comments. After the first round, participants were eager to talk and the conversation flowed smoothly from participant to participant.

After the talking circle was completed, the participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and to write them down. The students turned in the personal reflections as part of an assignment. In the student reflections, the students responded to two key questions/prompts:

1. What did you learn about cultural diversity from the talking circle experiences?
2. Describe your experience with using the talking circle method. What did you think about it as a method to explore issues of diversity?

Students were asked to provide type written responses to the questions. The student was able to determine the length of the response they wanted to write. The pool of student responses averaged one to

two pages in length. They were given one week from the day of the talking circle to write their reflections.

The sample in the classroom reflected the cultural diversity of the city in southern California in which the university was located. The professor chose the activity as an opportunity to help students step outside of the textbook to discuss ethnocentrism, racism and cultural diversity through shared life experiences.

A grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2001; Charmaz, 2014; Corbind & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers believed that this approach was the best fit for this research as Charmaz (2000) noted, 'The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. The story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed' (p. 522). The researchers first immersed themselves in the data, looking for similarities and patterns for themes. The data were coded, organized into categories, and labeled. Data that were conceptually different were given a new label. When all the data were coded and organized, linkages between the themes, causal conditions, and outcomes were identified (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1999). At this point, in accordance with grounded theory work, the researchers conducted a literature review. Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that 'there is always something new to discover' (p. 36), and it is unnecessary to review all of the literature before starting the study. Grounded Theory has a general assumption that the literature review is not used prior to the research process; researchers are unequivocally and overtly encouraged to conduct the literature review after completing the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The review of the literature then reveals 'how these studies leave unexplored certain critical aspects of the phenomenon' (p. 43).

Member checking (Charmaz, 2014) took place by using two persons that were available from the original group. They provided feedback that the material was true to their experience with the group. In order to further verify the credibility of the findings of the study, two of the participants who took part in the circle were asked to read the manuscript and provide comments.

The researchers used the techniques of bracketing (*epoche*), peer

review, and participant feedback in order to mitigate researcher bias and enhance the trustworthiness of this study. Bracketing was done through an analytical and reflexive review of the researchers' emotions, perceptions, and reactions to the data (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers met regularly to discuss the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data. They reviewed all the data independently looking for major themes and patterns, and then they met as a group to compare notes and discuss the core category and emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **Sample Characteristics**

The ages of the participants ranged from 20s to 40s. The majority were in their 20s. All the participants were first year female MSW students. Eleven identified as Latino, five as Asian, one as African American, one as white, and two as mixed ethnicity.

## **Results**

Groupwork has a long history of connections to social justice, empowerment and social change (Singh & Salazar, 2010). There has been a strong multicultural movement in counseling. This movement is largely responsible for stimulating scholarship on how group members' worldviews, values and identity are culturally informed. In a sense, all groupwork is multicultural. Group leaders can use members' differences to facilitate change and growth. Differences within group members can be used to identify ways in which groups can be utilized to identify ways to address racism, ethnocentrism and cultural prejudice. This modality can be used as a springboard for members to become more sensitive to diversity and help them grow. In addition, talking circles can enhance a group's ability to deal with oppression by providing different personal insights from participants.

Much like Breton (1994, 1995) and Mullender & Ward (1985, 1989) explain, the results of this talking circle suggest that it is a good tool to enhance social justice and empower the participants. According to Dylan (2003), in the talking circle the empowerment process belongs to everyone. The analysis of the student personal reflections written by



the 20 participants in this study generated a core category of ‘personal participation empowerment’. The themes identified underneath this core category included 6 key areas: safety, respect, inclusion and participation of all members, breaking stereotypes introspection and insights, commonalities.

### **Participants felt safe**

One finding that was expressed unanimously was that the circle engendered an environment where the participants felt safe. Safety in the group session allowed participants to share in a way that might not be fostered in other formats of groupwork. All the participants wrote that they could let their guard down knowing that they would not be interrupted, challenged, or pressured by others when they spoke. This process was empowering; group members reported that they could express their thoughts accurately and completely as they wished. One participant wrote:

*I felt safe to discuss things that I felt vulnerable about because I did not feel that I was being judged and that no one would laugh at what I said.*

Exploration of personal biases was another topic that several participants shared in their reflections. The traditional classroom setting may not be a safe place for students to think about these issues. One group member reflected about her own bias towards other cultures:

*The circle was a way for me to interact and learn from others without being nervous or cautious about what I said.*

As the circle proceeded and each person shared about her experiences while others listened, a bond was created; one of confidence and trust. This trust allowed the participants to break down barriers about sharing personal experiences. According to one participant:

*Once I heard others sharing similar experiences, I realized that my experiences weren't so isolated. I relaxed and became open to share what was in my heart.*

In this one-session talking circle, a few participants mentioned how the format helped them develop a comfort level with exploring this topic for the first time with a group. One participant wrote that the circle provided a non-personal and therefore non-offensive means for participants to share their difficult experiences:

*We could share [and therefore understand] that what some may find funny may be hurtful to others.*

Overall, safety in the group setting helped participants develop their own level of comfort, share a personal experience, and learn from their classmates.

### **Participants felt respected**

Respect in the talking circle took many forms, according to what the students wrote: understanding the sensitivity of the topic, attention by all group members, cultural awareness, and respect of the process to allow members the time and space to share their thoughts. Most of the participants wrote that when they held the feather they felt that others in the circle gave them their full attention. Each person had the chance to share her thoughts or to remain silent when the feather came around. When a person spoke, everyone listened. This level of attention may not happen in other types of groups. According to one participant,

*I felt that others ... really cared about what I was saying.*

The talking circle allowed students to have a common ground and to share in a way that was most comfortable for each person. One student, for whom English is a second language, wrote:

*I was able to say exactly what I wanted to in a calm and confident manner. ...I am usually scared that others would judge me or would not be able to understand what I say because English is my second language. Because everyone was so accepting and respectful, I found myself expressing my thoughts very well for the first time in a long while.*

About half of the students wrote that the circle had an egalitarian structure. The talking circle increases opportunities for all group members to have a voice. This contributed directly to everyone feeling respected. One participant wrote:

*Usually in class people who are opinionated will keep talking and shy people will not get a chance to voice their thoughts. In the circle everyone is given a turn to speak.*

### **Everyone participated**

The format of the talking circle creates a space where all members can participate if they choose. In this group, all participants shared in their personal reflections that the circle allowed them to get to know others better; whether they had been acquainted or had not spoken to the classmate before. The following were two of their comments:

*I actually got to know people in the class whom I haven't talked to.*

*Even though I talked to my classmates, I got to know all of them better through the circle.*

The value of deepening student connections in the midway point through the semester can help students strengthen the relationships with their classmates.

### **Developing empathy.**

Some participants wrote that as they listened to the stories of their fellow classmates they became empathetic and felt compassionate. One participant wrote that the experiences related by the ethnically diverse class made her aware of the different perspectives others held. Their outlook was a reflection of their unique upbringing and experiences. This taught her to be more tolerant. Some participants also wrote that the circle was an eye-opener as it revealed the more authentic aspects of their fellow classmates.

*I learned that although many of my classmates looked strong and together externally, they too had struggled with their [ethnic] identity and some continue to struggle. This just made them seem more real and not different from me.*

One participant reflected upon her feelings of self-compassion:

*Hearing the other students' stories made me realized that I am not alone having gone through identity confusion about my ethnicity.*

### **Bonding experience.**

Most of the participants wrote that as they shared their stories, they felt a sense of unity and of belonging to the group. One participant wrote

*...the circle provided a kind of intimacy...*

Several of the participants explicitly shared that the circle helped unburden them; it offered an avenue of support system to them. One participant of mixed heritage shared

*I gained an instant support system when I learned that so many received mistaken identities and felt just as frustrated as I did...*

Some of the participants wrote that the talking circle helped bring the class closer together.

*Even though we all are from very different backgrounds, it helped me to really appreciate who I am as a person as well as who my fellow classmates are. This activity engendered a sense of strength and freedom for everyone.*

A few students highlighted that through their experience of being in the circle, they felt much more comfortable being around the other classmates. For master's level students who will be working in a helping profession, developing a level of comfort in the classroom is important. The students are required to facilitate and participate in various groups during classes and internships.

## Breaking stereotypes

All the participants reported that the circle was a good way to help them confront their stereotypes.

*If someone did not speak, I tend to judge them by their physical appearance and behavior. Since our group is so diverse and everyone spoke openly, the circle was a powerful tool that helped me see through my stereotypes.*

*I was shocked when several of my classmates disclosed their ethnic backgrounds... I have to stop trying to guess the ethnicity of others.*

Some acknowledged that they needed to be more culturally competent.

## Introspection and insights

Several of the participants reported that as they listened to others, they were reflecting on their own experiences. This process helped them to gain new insights.

*I found that I really had not questioned my position about my ethnic identification as much before – as I did on that day.*

*The circle allowed me to take a step back from the stresses and busyness of everyday life and to self-reflect.*

The circle enabled the participants to gain new insights about ethnicity and diversity. The following statements illustrate these concepts:

*I learned more about oppression... It made me reflect on the hardships that my parents faced. Oppression doesn't just happen to the older generation. It occurs to people my age too.*

*I learned that ethnicity is an ongoing process... ethnicity is something that will keep changing as we adapt to new environments.*

Other students discussed their continuing struggles:

*I realized how ashamed I was of my heritage when I was growing up... I still have some negative feelings. However, I learnt that every culture has its negative and positive aspects.*

*During the circle I learnt just how unsure I am of my identity. ...I would give anything for a more defined identity... The circle helped me to reflect that being of a mixed background is also amazing...and it reminded me that I am not alone in this hardship of self-identity.*

*The circle was an eye-opener for everyone with regard to the diversity that existed among them.*

*I learned how others viewed themselves and what cultures they identified with.*

*I learned that even though we share this class time together every week, we process things differently and use information differently because of our background.*

## **Commonality**

Some of the participants indicated that through their experience of being in the circle, they learned that they shared similar life experiences with others.

*I have been seen as different my whole life ...This was the first time I consciously heard others say that they felt the same way I did... I was called 'Oreo' because I was black on the outside and white inside. Two of my Asian classmates said that they were called coconuts... I honestly thought it was a black person's issue.*

*In addition, all of the participants indicated that they have had positive as well as painful experiences relating to diversity and race, yet they all still felt proud of being part of the American melting pot.*

## **Discussion**

The talking circle format creates a space that fosters best practices within groupwork (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2008). In particular, there has been more of a focus on multiculturalism in groupwork practice (Black & Stone, 2005; Merchant, 2006; Merchant, 2009; Singh & Salazar, 2010). The talking circle approach is one group

method that can help members become inclusive and promote greater understanding to increased cultural knowledge across groups. Specifically, the Association for Specialists in Group Work's (ASGW, 2012) principles support the need to 'Use culturally grounded frameworks and techniques that provide the best fit for group members' cultural context' (p. 5)

The findings of this study support the notion that talking circles provide an efficacious structure as a model of groupwork. Personal reflections from the talking circle participants yielded rich data about the overall group experience. The key themes of safety, respect, inclusion, empathy, bonding, and breaking stereotypes were developed through analysis of the data.

The theme of safety is an important consideration in groupwork practice. This concept is related to the work in studies by Hodge et al (1996) and Momper et al (2011). The participants in the current study reported that their experience of being in the circle was one where they felt safe and respected. These feelings enhanced their ability to relate candidly to one another yet non-offensively. Interrelatedness is a major component of the talking circle, where members' words become palpably and intuitively interactive (Dylan, 2003).

Respect towards others and inclusion were prominent themes in the personal reflections. Participants were able to develop empathy and bond with class members. This is similar to findings by Becker et al (2006) and Hodge et al (1996) in which participants were able to bond and have empathy for one another. Participants experienced acceptance, worthiness, and connection to group members who in turn, through mutual empathy, were able to support each other in the group. In addition, the talking circle provided the participants with an egalitarian structure to share their experiences, which provided insights and introspection. This experience of awareness of time for members and self-referential listening creates a group experience that supports mutual aid (Dylan, 2003).

This talking circle focused on the discussion of ethnocentrism and learning to be more culturally and ethnically sensitive. Participants were also learning to not take stereotypical comments so seriously in their daily life as all people project stereotypes. The participants described how the process challenged their personal stereotypes and expanded their knowledge of group members' experiences. The

use of respectful listening in the talking circle safeguards against the development of scapegoats and defensive members (Dylan, 2003; Shulman, 2008). This process enhanced the participants' ability to be aware of how stereotypes develop while not identifying with them.

Having people speak in turn is a reminder that everyone has a place, and each person is an equal, yet unique member of the group (Dylan, 2003). The collective orientation in the talking circle focuses on the strength of the group, not the individual power. The findings of this study unequivocally support the notion that the talking circle is an efficacious tool that may be used by participants to express and learn, and to become better educated on topics that would otherwise be challenging to discuss, such as issues of ethnic diversity and ethnocentrism.

For these social work students, the talking circle was a great tool to explore their own ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of their classmates. It helped them to become more culturally aware, sensitive and competent starting with their classmates. Because talking circles are highly structured, the beginning phase of the group dynamic, which may be stressful, is minimized (Berman-Rossi, 1992). The circle promoted personal growth and enhanced cultural awareness. Ultimately, the talking circle is a tool that participants can in turn utilize in their professional groupwork practice.

## **Implications and future research**

While there are some implications for the use of talking circles, there are many future research possibilities and learning experiences based on this groupwork method. In this case, the facilitator led a one-session talking circle with this group of students. However, the value of the group was apparent through the participants' expression of the experience in their personal reflections. Despite being a one-session talking circle, the overall evaluation from the students overwhelmingly indicated the effectiveness of this method in the classroom. Granillo et al (2010) had similar results with the use of the one-session talking circle used for training public health workers. It would be an error to deem the talking circle as a narrow model, when in fact the ritual structure allows members to listen more closely and have richer



discussions about topics (Lang, 1979).

Multiple talking circle sessions can explore a range of other difficult issues in depth that might have been considered too limited for one circle. Talking circles that occur over multiple sessions create a space for participants to share in a more in-depth manner (Momper et al, 2011; Wolf & Rickard, 2003).

All participants in this talking circle were female and were in a similar age group range. While this can be seen as a limitation it can also be seen as a strength for the group in this session. Circles that expand the types of participants can enhance the exploration of the topics shared in the group (Granillo et al, 2010; Wickham et al, 2009; Wilbur et al, 2001).

It would be interesting if the circle could be used across several weeks or months. Future studies could use multiple talking circle sessions in a semester to help students expand their experience and utilize the tools to assess and discuss a variety of topics that might arise (Becker, et al, 2006; Hodge et al, 1996; Momper et al, 2011). With more built-in class time for talking circles, more themes could be explored and build upon the experience for students. This could allow for a deeper analysis of the key themes and the group could explore how to deal with thematic issues that arise from session to session.

Singh & Salazar (2010) point to a need to continue to refine how concepts such as empowerment and social justice are used in groups. The talking circle is one such way to expand the idea of group practice that allows participants to fully engage in these conversations. Research suggests that returning to traditional models, such as the talking circle, can be very effective in groupwork (Ross, 1996). At the end of the semester when reviewing the course, the students in this study acknowledged the value of the talking circle as one of the highlights of the course. The power of the talking circle group is further illustrated by the group members' experiences. The value of the group is expressed through their words, explicated in the following three memorable quotes that summarize the experience of the group:

*It was a liberating experience for me... I loved the circle.*

*The circle revealed more than I expected about not only others but myself as well.*

*I think the circle was one of the most beneficial tools we have used in any of my classes to date.*

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