

Cultural Proficiency Classroom Circle Protocol

Overview: This protocol is designed to build community and cultural awareness in an elementary or secondary classroom. By sharing and listening as questions are facilitated by the teacher, students and teachers will have increased awareness that the culture of a classroom is unique, complex, and goes far beyond surface level. The protocol is designed as a tool to foster safer, more inclusive classrooms in which all students experience a sense of belonging.

Time: 15-30 minutes, depending on the number of questions presented

Materials: Talking piece (choose an object of interest that can be passed around)

Participants: All students and the teacher

Step 1:

- Organize chairs or desks in the classroom so that students and teacher can sit in a circle.
- Alternately, if appropriate for space and developmental level, students and teacher can sit in a circle on the floor.

Step 2:

- Present guidelines for the circle:
 - The talking piece controls the talking - only the person with the piece may speak
 - Be a good listener - listen to hear and understand, NOT to respond
 - Always show respect, no matter what is said
 - It is okay to pass if you are not comfortable or do not have anything to share for that question
 - Technology is not allowed in the circle
- Alternately, if you plan to use this protocol repeatedly throughout the year you can involve students in developing the guidelines and a teacher may also modify guidelines as needed
- Optional: Teach students acceptable non-verbals to acknowledge their classmates who are speaking
 - Thumbs up - I agree or I like
 - Thumbs together - I connect or I feel the same way

Step 3:

- The teacher reads the question and lets the students know if they will work clockwise or counter-clockwise to respond
- The teacher models, connects with the class, and makes participation safer by being the first to share
- The teacher passes the talking piece to the next person
- The talking piece is passed around the circle as each person shares or passes

Step 4:

- Repeat steps 1-3 at least 2 more times so students answer a minimum of 3 questions
- Consider repeating additional times based on time available and nature/needs of the students in that class

Critical Elements: It is very important that the circle builds a sense of trust and community. Students should never be pressured to participate and the teacher's willingness to share honestly can help develop that trust. When each person talks, they should be speaking their "own truth", not commenting on what other people have said.

Tips for the Facilitator: It is not unusual for students to be hesitant to share at first - trust is not automatic. Start with low-end, easy questions and stay out of the “deep end” at first. The more this protocol is used throughout the year, the more trust and understanding will develop among students and students and the teacher. This protocol involves a lot more listening than talking - having non-verbal responses can help students follow expectations.

Questions by Theme:

Travel

- What is the furthest place you have traveled from your current home?
- Where would you go on a “dream vacation”?
- If you had to pick one: mountains, beach, city, forest, jungle, or desert, which would it be?

Food

- What food have you seen, but are afraid to try?
- What food does your family eat at big celebrations?
- If you could only eat one food for the next month, what would it be?
- If you were an ice cream flavor, which one would you be? Why?
- What’s your least favorite type of candy?

Family/Friend

- What is your favorite family tradition?
- How would your family/best friend describe you?
- What is one important quality you look for in a friend?
- What is the best advice you have ever received?
- What is your favorite holiday? Why?
- What responsibilities or “chores” to you have in your family?

Language

- In what languages do you know 10 or more words?
- If you could choose another language to communicate fluently in, which would you choose?
- What language do you think would be the most difficult to learn and why?

Entertainment

- What is your favorite movie?
- What is something your family does for fun that does not involve technology?
- If you had an entire Saturday to do what you wanted, how would you spend the day?
- What would you do if someone gave you one million dollars?
- If you could be famous for having any talent, which would it be? Why?

Interests/Other

- If you could earn a living as a professional athlete, what sport would you choose and why?

- If you could be absolutely anything, what would you want to be?
- Do you collect anything? If not, what would like to have a collection of?
- If you painted a picture, what would you choose to paint?
- What's your greatest accomplishment so far?
- What's one of the first things you would do if you became president?
- Name something that you have recently done for the first time.
- Name something that you have never done, but would like to try.
- What is your favorite season? Why?
- What is a valuable lesson you learned "the hard way"?
- What is your most prized possession? Why?
- What is one thing on your "bucket-list"?
- What is the first thing you like to do every day when you get home from school?
- What is something you always do on the weekend?