

AN INTRODUCTION OF A WHOLE SCHOOL PASTORAL CARE APPROACH: CIRCLE TIME

PSİKOLOJİK DANIŞMA VE REHBERLİKTE KULLANILACAK BİR TEKNİK OLARAK ÇEMBER ZAMANI

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ABSTRACT: With the realisation of the importance that self-esteem has as a central role in children's success in school and furthermore for their future in the work place and their personal lives, educators identified some systems, which can be integrated into school life, that target self-esteem and social and emotional skills. One such model is Circle Time, a proactive Pastoral Care system that is based on boosting self-esteem and personal – emotional - social skills (PES) and therefore life skills. This review focuses upon this pro-active approach within the pastoral care curriculum, which has been gaining ground recently: Circle Time, a system that gives all parties within the school community opportunities to develop their self-esteem and PES. This review will concern itself with introducing the concept, descriptions of the possible application of Circle Time within Turkish schools and the possible advantages of this approach for schools. Furthermore this review will discuss the need for pre-service and in-service education for the application of Circle Time within Turkish schools.

Keywords: circle-time, guidance and counselling, pastoral care (personal, social and emotional education), self-esteem

ÖZET: Benlik değerinin çocukların okul başarısında ve daha sonraki yaşantılarındaki öneminin farkına varan eğitimciler okullarda benlik değerini artırmaya yönelik alternatif yolların oluşturulması için okul yaşamıyla bütünleşen çeşitli modeller geliştirmişlerdir. Bu modellerden Çember Zamanı, sürekli destekleyici olma özelliği olan bir rehberlik anlayışına sahiptir. Temelinde öğrencilerin benlik değerini ve kişisel-sosyal ve duygusal becerilerini ve dolayısıyla yaşam becerilerini artırmaya yönelik çalışmalar yer almaktadır. Bu makale, temellerini yurtdışında hali hazırda oluşturan fakat Türkiye’de henüz sistematik olarak kullanıma geçmemiş Çember Zamanı Modeline odaklanmıştır. Çember Zamanı, kurumdaki herkesin (öğretmen, öğrenci, ve diğer çalışanlar) benlik değerini ve yaşam becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik kullanılan bir modeldir. Makalede öncelikle Çember Zamanı tanıtılmış ve bu sistemin Türkiye’deki okullarda uygulanabilirliği ele alınarak, uygulanmasıyla birlikte oluşabilecek avantajlar tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca Çember Zamanı sisteminin uygulanabilmesi için öğretmen yetiştiren kurumların örgün eğitimlerinde ve öğretmenlerin hizmetçi eğitimde bunların vurgulanması gerektiği tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: benlik değeri, çember zamanı, rehberlik ve psikolojik danışmanlık,

1. INTRODUCTION

A large body of research confirms that there is a strong link between children's self-esteem and their academic success. When children feel good about themselves then they learn more easily and retain information more readily (Lawrence, 1988, 1996; Purkey, 1970; White, 1990). These research findings gave clear clues to researchers and educators that there was a need to find and develop some alternative ways to enhance self-esteem in school. The provision of opportunities for children to feel good about themselves and to feel unique, important and worthwhile are all ways of boosting self-esteem. When educators realised that self-esteem is of central importance to children's success in school and furthermore for their future in the work place and their personal lives, they identified some systems, which can be integrated into school life. One such model is Circle Time, a proactive pastoral care system that is based on boosting self-esteem and personal – emotional - social skills (PES) and therefore life skills. Here there is a need for clarification on Pastoral Care especially if one thinks it is a very new terminology for us. Pastoral care is about education

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in its widest sense. It aims to support successful learning as part of the student's development, and in this way the teaching and curriculum can contribute to the personal and social education of the child. Thus pastoral care promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of students and prepares students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (David and Charlton, 1996). This concept may be not a perfect match of guidance and counselling systems or counsellors job in Turkish schools yet approximately covers the intention of why guidance and counselling systems are established in Turkish schools.

If we turn back our purpose that is introducing one of the proactive pastoral care systems, Circle Time, there is a need for mentioning its key features. The most importantly this system is intended to cover every aspect of the school from the classroom to the playground and into the lunchtime and to involve school staff, including ancillary staff and, of course, the students. It is a multi-disciplinary system because it considers the needs of teachers in terms of their self-esteem, both as an individual and in their role as 'boosters of children's self-esteem'. In order to understand what is Circle Time there is necessity to look at how people describe this approach and the following section aims to give clarity what people mean by Circle Time. Then this paper will look at how Circle Time works within schools. In the last section there is an exploration of opportunities of how we can adapt Circle Time to the Turkish schools context as a personal and social development policy since it can be a part of a guidance and counselling system in the schools.

2. WHAT IS CIRCLE TIME?

Circle Time has come out of a tradition linked to the ideas of group processes and an underlying theme has been that "*education is a social process which requires that we must work together to understand each other's world.*" (Mosley, 1988 p.10). From this point of view, practitioners of Circle Time consider group work a key device. It is seen as important because being able to relate to other people around one is a fundamental life skill as human relations are an integral aspect of life. From this point of view Curry and Bromfield (1994) clarify this situation as follows: "*Circle Time is aimed at developing the unique potential of each individual, of looking at their social and emotional growth and nurturing this within a caring group environment. Circle Time provides the person-centred setting that allows for the development of communication systems built on respect for every person in which healthy positive relationships can flourish.*" (p.7)

In order to understand what exactly Circle Time is, it needs to look at further definitions. White (1992, 1993) for example describes it as "*...a group process that uses strategies which help children develop skills to understand themselves and to express their individuality. It helps them to appreciate others and the value of friendship, encouraging the individual to be aware of feelings and how to handle them. It assists in how to handle peer pressure and upsets, encouraging co-operation and welcoming new challenges and opportunities to take risks. decision making and alternative solutions are brought forward, which promotes self-direction and learning from mistakes*" (White, 1993, p.99)

Mosley's definition emphasises the value of a whole school approach. She states that "*Circle Time is a democratic and creative approach used to consider a wide range of issues affecting the whole school community, teaching staff, children, support staff, parents and governors*" (1993, p. 9). Furthermore Mosley (1993) mentions Circle Time promotes student's personal social and emotional developments as a life skills, thus self-esteem building is the part of Circle Time. This has been picked up by Curry and Bromfield's definition as well: "*Circle Time is a way of supporting children and enhancing self-esteem, of making a safe environment in which to take risks, to explore feelings, to discuss conflicts in a non-blaming, non-punitive way and a process that encourages the children to believe that they are worthwhile people.*" (1994, p.7)

It seems in the light of these definitions that Circle Time is answering the students' needs in terms of pastoral care rather than being a support or guidance device, which is called upon only when things go wrong. Rather it is a pro-active and continuous whole school approach to education (Courtman, 1996). As a whole school approach, Circle Time sessions should be initiated for all staff (teaching and non-teaching). Circle Time is unique in that it is a positive and practical response to a need to feel secure, respected and supported which all schools should provide to all their members. Then the important question is how Circle Time operates.

3. HOW DOES CIRCLE TIME WORK?

A typical Circle Time session can be suitable for pre-school, primary and secondary schools and should be a weekly timetabled activity that involves the whole class (30+) sitting in their chairs. Sitting in a circle is a symbol of wholeness, mutual respect and participation (Mosley, 1993; White, 1993). It encourages eye contact with each member therefore an atmosphere of openness and trust develops. Children need to be in a comfortable position to concentrate, to listen, to think and the teacher should notice and praise the skills of thinking, looking, listening and speaking in order to reinforce them. In that sense it is different from circle rituals which are briefer and which may be conducted with the children seated on the floor for a few minutes taking rounds for completing sentences, in order to prepare children for a learning session (Mosley, 1996).

To set up these positive group sessions all the members of the circle suggest their own ground rules in order to build a sense of safety. These ground rules are called 'golden rules' in the first session of the weekly time-tabled Circle Time (Mosley, 1993, 1996; Mosley & Tew, 1999) and they are "*the moral values agreed by everyone that will inform and develop the culture of the classroom*" (Mosley, 1996, p. 38). Ground rules also need to be supported by rewards and sanctions to encourage the desired behaviour, good communication, build trust and to encourage children to try even harder. Golden rules are supplied for clarity and safety and as they are developed by the children and negotiated amongst the group, all are beholden to them and if they break the ground rules they can get a warning first such as sad face placed beside her/him. If there is still a problem with the same child a more formal warning sign is given. Different sanctions can be applied such as losing five minutes in the circle time so children can learn the result of unacceptable behaviour by losing something that they desired. On the other hand rewards and incentives need to be placed in the negotiation or agreement while they are discussing the golden rules. (Mosley, 1996).

The other characteristic of Circle Time is that teachers should not say anything negative or judgemental. Instead of noticing negative behaviour or saying something judgemental the teacher should try to notice and praise another child in the circle for showing the accepted behaviour. (Mosley, 1996) thus encouraging good behaviour and at the same time not stigmatising the child with the bad behaviour. The nature of a safe group brings a sense of belonging and a sense of respect, a feeling of being listened to and of empathy which will result in open and honest communication, more supportive and assertive behaviour, a decrease in defensive attitudes and in aggressive, manipulative or withdrawn behaviour. Circle Time activities and structures allow the sharing of thoughts and feelings willingly in a safe atmosphere and the initiation of collective responsibility for the promotion of self-esteem and positive behaviour.

A key aspect of Circle Time is that each participant knows that their feelings are valued and respected and this in turn encourages a feeling of safety and thus confidence. In a proactive, pastoral care system, effective teachers demonstrate genuine, unconditional positive regard and empathy-based understanding which is a core condition in the Rogerian Model (Rogers, 1970, 1983).

A first requirement of the Circle Time sessions is that members physiological or survival needs need to be satisfied. Then with teachers and the other members of the circle developing the golden rules, and the

implementation of Rogerian core conditions, the participants' safety needs can be satisfied. If the circle members meet with these two needs having been met and through this development process a positive, respectful, caring, and attentive group climate is in place then love, affection and belonging will follow. These good experiences in meeting individual needs bring about positive self-esteem and the breakdown of all barriers to actualise oneself and helps to promote positive life skills. Regular Circle Time aims to provide just such an atmosphere in order to *“build friendship ... create trust ... eliminate put-downs ... promote personal and collective responsibility ... encourage self-discipline ... promote better behaviour ... develop personal integrity ... develop empathy ... teach assertiveness skill ... create a sense of belonging ... promote understanding ... improve relationships ... solve problems ... improve listening skills ... integrate special needs children with the class in school.”* (Mosley, 1993, p.11)

The Circle Time structure uses activities such as games and drama strategies to create this type of climate. Silverstone, (1997) uses art therapy with a person-centred approach in the class to develop the person, enhance self-esteem and actualisation, which allows a more creative and peaceful person in him/herself. There are similarities in the strategies of Circle Time and of Creative Therapy to provide personal-social development and a positive ethos. Through this positive ethos of the classroom or Circle Time, individuals can now take risks in re-organising their self-image and they feel they have a choice, by being responsible for their own learning and behaviour. This leads them to adopt creative approaches to their lives because they are now secure enough to experience new situations and they are confident in knowing that they are able to learn from their mistakes.

In Mosley's model of Circle Time (1993, 1996; Mosley and Tew, 1999) she suggests a whole school self-esteem and positive behaviour cycle which starts with Circle Time. Within this cycle developing Golden rules (Ground Rules) is the first step. This approach concentrates on an incentives and sanctions policy, which promotes and reinforces the golden rules that have been drawn up with all members of school outlining the acceptable behaviour that shows respect and caring towards one another (Mosley, 1993, 1996). The lunchtime policy of Circle Time is an example of how it reflects a whole school concept. Even after establishing these positive aspects for the school there will still be some students, “Children Beyond” as Mosley refers to them (1992, 1993, 1996). These children are those who are suffering from low self-esteem, or who may feel frightened, powerless and also have a sense of lack of control over their situations. These children need extra help to change their negative behaviour patterns. Establishing small therapeutic Circle Time sessions and in the words of Mosley, establishing *‘tiny achievable tickable targets’* can help them. In an article written by Shaw, (1991) the setting up of small therapeutic peer support groups in the school can encourage these difficult pupils to become more responsible and more able to co-operate with staff and other students. If, in the end, with teachers, the other school staff and parents working together and still one particular child shows negative behaviour patterns then containment should be part of the school action plan.

For an effective whole-school positive approach, school staff should hold Circle Time sessions too. The ideas underlying this approach is that teachers' self-esteem affects students' self-esteem and an atmosphere of positive co-operation between staff is directly reflected in the teachers' approach to the children. Furthermore a teacher alone might work on his/her own self-esteem through a personal care plan, which includes re-energising cognitively, emotionally, creatively, physically, spiritually and enjoying oneself. It is a system that Mosley (1996) argues that all individuals will benefit from, resulting, she claims, in a more healthy life through setting oneself tiny, achievable, tickable targets, participating in calming rituals, having golden moments and using breathing techniques. Then as an energetic and positive individual, the teacher can hold both classroom Circle Time sessions and staff Circle Time sessions (Mosley, 1996).

The Mosley model of Circle Time is highly structured to provide desirable, positive and supportive relationships. Each meeting generally includes the following structure and have specific purposes:

- *GAMES*, breaks tension, gives fun, encourages the self-control and provides participation, further more some specific games build trust and co-operation such as giving direction to the other pair whose eyes are closed.
- *ROUNDS*, to give a chance to express their ideas or feeling to every member of circle and to encourage listening to each other through the talking object. Talking object is a thing that can be anything such as an ornament egg, a small toy or a ring etc. While student holds this object it means that student allowed to talk. A theme or an idea is chosen as the focus for round. Sometimes a sentence started which each participant should complete e.g. I feel happy when... Each participant takes a turn to speak when s/he is holding the object. Every comment acceptable, participants may choose to pass and no one comment on what anyone else has said. At the end the teacher offers anybody who passed a second chance.
- *PAIR-WORKS*, pairs talk about an agreed issue and feedback to the pair and then the group what the other pair has said. This is to encourage and helps to “*sharpen up listening skills*” (Mosley, 1993, pp.117).
- *BRAINSTORMING*, encourages creativity and without prejudice everyone is valued and shown to be valued.
- *NOMINATION OF SUCCESS*, to provide a positive atmosphere and praise to be given by the others thus giving confidence to the member of the circle. It is essential that members of circle receive verbal and tangible praise for any success or personal achievement.
- *DRAMA STRATEGIES*, to explore issues using past experiences and reflection. It helps to express hidden feelings, to try empathy, to understand others, it is an opportunity to experiment with new behaviour and it is safe in the circle meetings. Also it encourages creativity through using imagination and also it gives fun time and to provide intimacy within the circle.
- *QUESTIONS*, “*a trigger question is put to the group, with time given for participants to explore their personal responses*” (Mosley, 1993, pp. 118).
- *DISCUSSION*, members of circle can express their opinion about current issues and they need to be ready to examine and respond to the other’s opinion. It is a good opportunity to learn effective communication skills through a structured discussion and it can give confidence to talk without feeling anxiety in front of people. Discussion requires the putting forward of more than one point of view and it is highly reciprocal in its nature. Also it requires the participants to be prepared to examine and be responsive to the different opinions put forward. The teacher role should be neutral as a chair of discussion. S/he should be a facilitator and a manager of the process. In this process while teacher should have subtle manner s/he also have a role of feeding rationality. Therefore teacher should encourage children to built on one another’s ideas, try to get children to see the implications of what they say, make them aware of their own assumptions and encourage them to find reasons to justify their beliefs.
- *REFLECTION*, the member’s of the circle can reflect together on the meanings of the experience that they just shared together.
- *CALMING RITUALS*, to teach them breathing exercises or relaxation exercises, thus the members of the circle can become calm and more peaceful and relaxed. They can use these strategies whenever they need them such as before exams or before talking in front of the public (Mosley, 1993, pp. 117-118).

In the circle time students express themselves through this structure and it allows each member of circle to learn from each other. It encourages learning from games, drama techniques, reflection and

discussion. So students get actively involved in the action and thus “learning through doing” occurs (Whitaker, 1995). Through a system of observing, listening, participating, and active and experiential learning as a group this leads to the development of a mechanism for attaining ones full potential.

4. ADAPTING CIRCLE TIME TO TURKISH SCHOOL CONTEXT

There is no argument about schools, teachers’ and counsellors’ role in developing personal and social aspects of students in Turkey. On the contrary the research findings are encouraging the importance of positive teacher and student relations and the important role of counsellors within schools and concludes that if teachers and the counsellors want to help and maintain positive self-esteem and positive behaviour within school they need to work on children’s personal, social and emotional development (Demirbolat, 2001; Gözütok, 2000). If we think that Turkish teachers should be responsible for the well-being of children in their classrooms and counsellors should be responsible for the well-being of children in their schools, as other teachers and counsellors in the world, we should take note that the basic requirements for teachers as the followings;

- being responsible for the social and emotional development
- establishing good social relationships
- helping young people to solve their own problems
- raising achievement
- encouraging parents to participate in school life
- ensuring entitlement for every child
- encouraging young people and teachers to care for and respect one another
- promoting responsible behaviour
- creating sense of identity and belonging
- helping young people to express their needs
- developing collaborative culture
- helping with pupils learning
- enabling pupils to participate in decision making
- encouraging students to be more challenging and assertive

(Askew and Carnell, 1995)

These statements are possible within classrooms with little effort from the classroom teacher and counsellors. This is especially true if there is a policy towards such achievement. Therefore for Circle Time in Turkish classrooms we can extract the important themes such as “weekly time tabled Circle Time meetings”, “whole school approach”, “reward and sanctions system as a behaviour management policy”, “lunchtime policy” and “regular staff Circle Time meetings” and adapt a ‘do-able’ pastoral care policy within schools. The only limitation is to educate classroom teachers towards this model and this could be part of the role of the school guidance and counsellor who also can be a coordinator for Circle Time. This limitation can be eliminated with pre-service and in-service training with school counsellors and classroom teachers about Circle Time. Using pre and in-service training supporting with workshops to introducing Circle Time system into schools can support teachers and school counsellors in order to get access to the information on how to develop Circle Time in their schools.

If school once wants this pro-active pastoral care system then staff Circle Time meetings can be the start of such a process. In these meetings the staff should feel safe and valued and free from external pressure

therefore introducing their own ground rules. This can be the beginning of a Circle Time policy in the school and later the coordinator systematically explains what this system does and how this system works and ensures that there is agreement towards a whole school approach because without this Circle Time can be limited in its achievement within the school. This is especially important if we consider some research findings that highlight that the effective schools are those that have created a positive atmosphere based on a sense of community and shared values and in which promoting good behaviour and promoting the values of mutual respect, self-discipline and social responsibility take place (Dawson and McNess, 1998; Mosley and Tew, 1999). As part of establishing a whole school Circle Time approach within schools there needs to be a process of building a reward and sanctions system as a behaviour management policy in which all members of the school contribute including non-teaching staff within school. The inclusion of non-teaching staff is important for two reasons: (a) as we have mentioned building a sense of community and shared values are important and (b) some behaviour problems occur during non-teaching time such as breaks and lunch times.

As within regular Circle Time, meetings can be appropriate for 30 or more students in the classrooms. The main ideology is to gather a whole class and to create a classroom culture yet the number of students in some a Turkish class can rise as high 50 or more which adversely effect the Circle Time process and its effectiveness. However we cannot divide the classroom therefore it may be inappropriate to suggest such system in very crowded classrooms or we can only suggest some activities not all activities within this system for these large classrooms and schools. The important thing is the establishment of a whole school approach and a behaviour policy and this can work in crowded schools. Weekly Circle Time sessions might be limited to only one activity at a time and this activity can focus on children expressing themselves, listening and most probably will have to focus on raising self-esteem. The class size issue is very relevant to primary and secondary education yet for younger children, especially with those at pre-school, the class size should be limited to 15 (Collins, 2001). If possible Circle Time should be started with even smaller circles and then gradually adapted to a bigger group. As we know young children like to talk but not to listen. Also with such adaptation we can eliminate the intimidation with a large open space for children.

The Turkish counsellor and teacher's role should not be different then their foreign colleagues whose using Circle Time. Therefore the counsellor and the teacher's task is to ensure that a Circle Time regime is as positive and supportive as possible and in order to make Circle Time work counsellors and teachers should also use their own creativity, adaptability and flexibility to Turkish schools. The structures should be 'age and culture' appropriate for Turkish children and also allow children to have fun and to think and therefore learn and reflect within classroom.

The important factor for Circle Time to be effective is the willingness of teacher, school counsellor and school to undertake such an approach and also their ability to maintain Circle Time and its positive and supportive structures. This seems to be a lot of extra work for Turkish school as a whole because there is a need for participating as a school community to professional development. First of all the teaching staff and school counsellor should be aware of their role and their responsibility, which are mainly helping students and their own personal emotional and social development as well as students and their self-esteem, in terms of Circle Time. One might think that school counsellor already takes similar tasks in school. Yet this task about Circle Time should be more systematic because operation of Circle Time includes some detailed aspects, which explained in How does Circle Time Works section in this paper. As a coordinator school counsellor's role includes further abilities such as coordinating whole school professional and personal development that requires a systematic evaluation of using Circle Time as well. Secondly for using Circle Time there is a definite need for education and training for Turkish schools. This can be at this moment school-based training of teachers and counsellors. Otherwise Circle Time could remain as an unproductive meeting as sometimes happens in English schools instead of becoming a pro-active approach (Bulut, 1997). Therefore the Circle Time coordinator –school counsellor- within school have a vital role in promoting

Circle Time in Turkish schools. Furthermore if they do not understand and convey the potential of Circle Time to school then it goes beyond its reason in the long term and Circle Time becomes another monotonous guidance and counselling activity.

5. CONCLUSION

As we have mentioned some research findings look at why some schools were more effective than others. It was simply because they have given more attention to students' self-esteem and their emotional and personal development. This again shows how important humanistic education and the student-centred classroom is. Therefore creating and generating a counselling atmosphere in the classroom is important as well. This article tried to show that teachers can create such an atmosphere with Circle Time without being a counsellor but just by using simple counselling strategies such as listening, being genuine, ensuring unconditional positive regard and having an empathy-based understanding. Also this article shows that a whole school Circle Time approach is a positive intervention and research findings in England show that this approach as a proactive pastoral care system in which personal, social and emotional development is important (Bulut, 1997; Dawson and McNess, 1998; Housego and Burns, 1994; Lown, 2002; Mosley, 1988; Stevens, 1995; Tew, 1998; White, 1990;). Therefore there is, in the first instance, a very real potential for Turkish schools to try to adapt a whole school Circle Time approach or at least to try to maintain its positive and supportive structures within classrooms. Yet in order to achieve this potential there is a definite need for further education and training for teachers and school counsellors in terms of their role and responsibility within Circle Time.

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