Circle Time Check-Ins in Secondary Schools:
A Classroom Approach to Improving Students’ Social Responsibility
by
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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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April 30th, 2018
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to add to the field of research on circle time use in secondary schools and on the use of Circle Time Check-Ins in secondary schools for creating a sense of belonging and improving students’ social and emotional skills. The author hoped her research would also provide motivation for other educators to explore how circle process can benefit students of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. The author’s personal interest in creating a more welcoming environment for students in secondary school and to promote positive interactions between students was a motivating factor in the creation of this study. Additionally, finding research that supported the circle as a successful method for teaching and developing social and emotional skills in elementary students and for build belonging in college and university students, and further research which demonstrated the positive relationship between peer acceptance, friendships, and future academic achievement were other factors that strengthened the author’s interest in examining Circle Time Check-Ins. This quantitative study investigated the degree to which a class of Grade 8 students’ reported social responsibility levels improved after participating in weekly Circle Time Check-Ins. Student participants completed a survey to measure their levels on the construct of ‘social responsibility’ before and after the 8-session treatment period. Results indicated that although some students’ scores improved, the treatment did not result in a meaningful improvement for the majority of students. Factors that may have had an effect on the results of this study such as the frequency and content of the discussions, facilitator confidence, and other external factors that could have influenced the students’ responses are discussed. Limitations to this study including its purely quantitative nature are addressed, and suggestions for future researchers and secondary educators are presented.
Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge my parents, Rob and Charlotte Brown, who have been both my greatest coaches and my most loyal fans throughout my life. You have always supported me, believed in me, and cheered me on no matter what new activity or adventure I was pursuing. Thank you.

To my husband, Brent, thank you for allowing me to spend countless hours and days in front of the computer focussing on research, writing papers, stressing over assignments, and responding to online discussions. I will be forever grateful to you for all of your cooking, cleaning, and patience. Thanks also for editing my papers, being an audience for practice presentations, and pretending to care about my topics. I appreciate and love you for all of this, especially for getting me outside for the occasional break!

Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Harry Janzen, who first introduced me to check-ins and the importance of taking the time to build relationships with the people we work alongside. It was your early classes that sparked the development of my amazing friendships within Cohort 9.

To the REACH 2018 selection committee, thank you for honouring me as a recipient of a REACH award. I am extremely grateful.

Lastly, thank you to my awesome Cohort 9 classmates (and car-pool buddies) for your tremendous support and encouragement. Your passion and good will motivates me to be better. Thanks for making me laugh and cry and for making me think. I look forward to our continued friendships in the years to come!
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Chapter 1: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

School values and goals from around the world state the importance of engaging young people in becoming socially responsible citizens (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Shaw, 2010). Talbot (1997) pointed out there are many young people whose spiritual, moral, and social development is promoted only while in school. Therefore, it is imperative that students are taught these skills and that they are taught in a whole-class cross-curricular context in order to be inclusive of all learners of all abilities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Schoenfeld, Rutherford, Gable, & Rock, 2008).

Furthermore, many students experience difficulty when transitioning from elementary school to secondary school (Tew, 1998; Wentzel, 1998). This could be due to a new school environment, a lack of connectedness (Whitlock, 2004), the perception that teachers no longer care (Tew, 1998; Wentzel, 1998), or an increase in bullying (Lee, 2004; Levine & Tamburrino, 2013) or cyber-bullying (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012). Creating a warm, welcoming environment through the development of positive personal relationships is crucial.

Many teens depend on peer relationships to establish and maintain positive self-concept (Wentzel, 1998). Perceived support from peers has been linked to improved social adjustment and behaviour, and increased motivation to help and cooperate with others (Wentzel, 1998). Perceived positive relationships between students and teachers has led to improved attendance, engagement in school (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004) and increased achievement (Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2009).

The issues above motivated the author of the present study to look for a way to help students in Grade 8 build positive relationships and become kinder, more empathetic,
cooperative, and socially responsible citizens. The purpose of the present study was to determine whether the use of Circle Time Check-Ins in Grade 8 would lead to the improvement of social responsibility levels in students. There was an assumption that Circle Time Check-Ins would have a positive effect on students’ social responsibility and that further benefits could have included improvements in the learning conditions of participating students, improved working conditions and levels of stress for participating teachers, and an increase in overall learning and achievement for students during the period of the study. It was also assumed, by the author of the present study, students could benefit in future years, due their personal growth and experiences during the study. Future consideration could be given to the adoption of Circle Time Check-Ins across all grades.

For the Circle Time Check-ins to be effective, positive, and worthwhile, they had to be planned and implemented with a clear focus. Teaching communication skills, building relationships, increasing empathy and respect for others, and understanding the value of different opinions, was planned as a focus of each check-in session. Strategies for teaching these skills, during circle time, were also explored.

There was also a general assumption that the present study would be approved and that students and teachers would be willing to participate.

**Justification of the Study**

Curriculum across the world is changing to emphasize skills such as communication, listening, collaboration, cooperation, critical thinking, and personal and social responsibility. Circle time check-ins have been used successfully in elementary schools to help students develop these skills as well as to become more confident, more trusting and accepting of others, and more engaged in their learning (Collins, 2013; Curry, 1997; Tew, 1998). According to Lown (2002),
the improved levels of social competence and positive behaviour that pupils experience from circle time check-ins could lead to greater opportunities for effective learning in all classes.

The transition from elementary school to secondary school can be difficult for some students as they can be separated from their previous peer groups. In secondary school they are mixed in classes with those from other feeder schools whom they do not know. A weekly circle check-in at the secondary level can help build relationships between students and their peers, and also between students and teachers (Lown, 2002). Students may then connect to their teacher by learning that they share a common interest such as a sport or some place they have visited. Teachers, in turn, can gain a better understanding of the pupils themselves, and the problems the students face (Lown, 2002). This understanding can lead to improvements in teachers’ attitudes and behaviours toward students, which has been shown to be a powerful influence on student behaviour and achievement (Dupper et al., 2009). It is important to encourage and provide opportunities for students and teachers to foster new relationships in secondary school as positive relationships are shown to improve motivation, attendance, achievement, and school behaviour (Anderson et al., 2004).

Building friendships and developing understanding and empathy toward others has also been shown to reduce bullying (Levine & Tamburrino, 2013) and cyber-bullying, which are an increasing problem in secondary schools (Paul et al., 2012). Similarly, feeling cared for, respected, and part of the school environment, also emerged as critical variables in dropout prevention (as cited in Anderson et al., 2004) and reducing out-of-school suspensions (Dupper et al., 2009).
Research Question and Hypotheses

The following research question was addressed in the present study: To what degree, if any, will the use of weekly Circle Time Check-Ins in a Grade 8 classroom lead to the improvement of social responsibility levels, as reported by students?

The author of the present study hypothesized that by introducing weekly Circle Time Check-Ins students’ social responsibility would improve. Students would become more aware of others and more empathetic and respectful toward their peers, themselves, and the adults in the school environment. It was also hypothesized that students in the present study would become more confident and comfortable sharing opinions and working collaboratively.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study Circle Time Check-Ins are weekly sessions that involve class members sitting in a circle where they are given an opportunity to share and be listened to. Students and adults in the class participate as equals and the teacher acts as a facilitator. Members may be asked to respond to a prompt, provided by the teacher, or to share what is on their minds. Members of the circle are taught during circle time to listen attentively, to be positive and respectful, to refrain from criticizing others, and to speak from the heart.

The term social responsibility is used to describe the behaviour of students that are kind, empathetic and respectful of their peers, themselves and the adults in the room. It includes when students act in the best interest of the group and think of how their actions affect other people’s welfare. Students also take care of the workspace by tidying up after themselves.

Students who are collaborative solve problems cooperatively, ask for help and suggestions from peers, discuss and explore strategies, and offer advice and assistance to others.
Brief Overview of Study

The present study investigated the degree to which Grade 8 students’ social responsibility levels improved after participating in weekly Circle Time Check-Ins, as reported by the students. Student participants completed a survey to measure their levels on the construct of ‘social responsibility’ before and after the study, 2 months later. The participants’ scores were analysed to determine their degree of improvement.
Chapter 2: Background and Review of Related Literature

Literature relating to the use of circle processes is overwhelmingly extensive and diverse. Circles are used for a variety of purposes in a variety of contexts and cultures around the world, and they are referred to in the literature by multiple names such as Talking Circles, Quality Circles, Peacekeeping Circles, Literature Circles, restorative justice circles, study circles, Simplicity Circles, and circle time (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Bockern, 2014; Curry, 1997; Thompson, 2011). Literature relating to the use of circle time check-ins in secondary schools, however, is limited. As the purpose of the current study was to help students in Grade 8 build positive relationships and become kinder, more empathetic, cooperative, and socially responsible citizens, the author of the present study has provided a summary of research relating to the following three themes: a) origin and background of circle and check-in, b) the circle for creating a sense of belonging and community, and c) benefits of circle time in schools (case studies). The author of the present study hoped her research would not only add to the limited documentation of circle time use in secondary schools, but also provide motivation for other educators to explore how circle process can benefit students of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

Origin and Background of Circle and Check-In

The concept of sitting in a circle to talk about one’s thoughts comes from the traditions of North American Indigenous people and Anglo-Saxon monks (Tew, 1998). According to First Nations Pedagogy Online (2009), talking circles were used to “ensure that all leaders in the tribal council were heard, and that those who were speaking were not interrupted” (para. 2). According to Baldwin and Linnea (2010) early hominids sat in groups around fires for warmth, safety, and food and this led them to discover that the circle could help design social order.
Baldwin and Linnea (2010) state, “the impulse toward circle remains active, almost instinctual, in humans today” (p. 5). They point out that when groups are engaged in dialogue, people arrange themselves in a circular formation so that everyone can see each other and be heard. This allows for body language and facial expressions to be used to express intentions as well as words (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Wilson, P. & Wilson, S., 2000). Other simple examples of this include when sports teams meet in a circle to discuss plays between periods and children arrange themselves in seated circles to play childhood games.

Documentation supporting how and why circle time works has been written as early as 1908 when Dr. J. L. Moreno “concluded that solutions could be found if we learn how to express problems safely” (as cited by Curry, 1997, p. 126). He strongly believed in the importance of ‘the group’ and the ways in which social interaction contributes to the development of self (Tew, 1998). Similarly, according to J. Wilbur, M. Wilbur, Garrett, and Yuhas (2001), traditional Native Americans have always believed that transformation should take place in the presence of the group, because people “are all related in very basic ways and can benefit from the support and insight of others” (p. 371). Mosley (1996) has also documented evidence that people learn best about themselves through interacting with others.

C. G. Jung, a twentieth century Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher, studied archetypes and the “power of the circle” (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010, p. 6). Archetypes are specific inherited images or symbols that all human beings share from deep within the human psyche (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Thompson, 2011). According to Baldwin and Linnea (2010), when chairs are arranged in a circle an archetypal energy can be created and some people find themselves “capable of responding with a level of creativity, innovation, problem solving, and visioning that astounds [them]” (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010, p. 6). Other people have explained it as “an
experience of synergy, being able to tap into something they didn’t know was in them and could not have predicted as a possible outcome at the start of a circle meeting” (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010, p. 6).

Documentation citing the importance of the circle in its structure and as a part of Aboriginal culture can be found in studies by P. Wilson and S. Wilson (1991, 1997, 2000). P. Wilson (1991) documented the trauma that Aboriginal students experienced as they moved from a circular (holistic) classroom structure to a linear one. Teacher-student interactions decreased and Aboriginal students were isolated as a group in the back row. In another study, P. Wilson (1997) found positive changes in communication patterns were experienced as more culturally relevant structures were incorporated in classrooms, and “a group of students progressed from ‘F’ to ‘A’ grades after the classroom was rearranged [in a circular format]” (as cited in Wilson, P., & Wilson, S., 2000, p. 2).

According to Thompson (2011), circle interactions in their purest form embrace the characteristics of “egalitarian participation, shared leadership, group determined purposes and processes, and voluntary membership” (p. 44). Sitting or standing in a circle encourages conversational, peer-oriented, and respectful dialogue and allows members to engage as equals (Thompson, 2011; Hampton & Norman, 1997). Other common practices that reinforce the belief that all members are equal include expectations for taking turns, reminders to listen without judgement, and agreed upon methods for handling interpersonal conflict (Thompson, 2011) or disrespectful behaviour (Mosley & Tew, 2014). These practices help to establish an environment where all members feel safe, are willing to contribute, and are “viewed as having the capability to contribute in meaningful ways” (Thompson, 2011, p. 44).
The check-in process. Although there are different approaches to circle time check-ins used at all levels of education (Tew, 1998) the general procedures are the same. People sit in a circle and take turns sharing how they feel or responding to a prompt and are encouraged to “speak from the heart” (First Nations Pedagogy Online, 2009, “General Process,” para. 1). Sitting in a circle allows everyone to see and to hear and promotes the idea that everyone is equal, including the participating facilitator. Check-ins can be lengthy or brief depending on the purpose. This time can be used by the teacher and students to become aware of each other’s state of mind, to teach and learn social and emotional skills such as personal responsibility and respect for others (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Tew, 1998; Thompson, 2011), to share and discuss solutions to problems in a format of trust and respect, to work on a whole class project, or to build positive relationships and become more comfortable with a new group (Housego & Burns, 1994; Stanier, 2009; Tew, 1998). In a check-in circle the facilitator may offer a prompt in the form of a question, a quote, a picture, or some other thought provoking idea to help students respond. Students are encouraged to be serious, sincere, and honest in their words. Listeners in turn are encouraged to practice self-control being respectful of what is being shared and to listen with an open mind. There is no need to respond to what is said although conversation may develop within the group and the facilitator may choose to nurture it or steer the group back to the individual. Most importantly, everyone must be given the opportunity to speak and to contribute one’s voice to the group in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment (First Nations Pedagogy Online, 2009).

Jenny Mosley’s model. Jenny Mosley’s model of Circle Time, which has been referenced in literature numerous times as developing self-esteem and promoting positive behaviours in the classroom (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Collins, 2013; Glazzard, 2016; Kelly,
1999; Tew, 1998), has a more prescriptive format. It starts with warm-up games, to promote relaxation and a sense of ‘group’ identity and to mix up seating arrangements, followed by a round where each person is given an opportunity to speak. This often includes ‘I feel’ statements where participants share how they are feeling and why. An open-forum round comes next. In this round students can ask for solution ideas from the group, respond to what others have said, or offer their own suggestions or advice. This often leads to an individual or group action plan. The closing phase involves group members celebrating success by offering praise or thanks to others for kind words and suggestions in either the current session or previous sessions (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Tew, 1998).

**The Circle for Creating a Sense of Belonging and Community**

A recurring theme emerging in the literature is that mainstream, Western society is frantic, full of stress, and focussed on the individual (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Ross, 1992; Tew, 1998; Thompson, 2011; Wheatley, 2005). Ross (1992), a retired assistant Crown Attorney for the District of Kenora, Ontario, wrote about how, for many Aboriginal people, the values and visions that give life significance conflict with the values of mainstream society. He believes there has been a loss of community integration and interpersonal connection and relationships in mainstream society and describes it as a “society of strangers” (Ross, 1992, p. 45). Ross (1992) believes that rather than having day-to-day activities that incorporate aspects of family, workplace, the home, recreation centre, school, nursery, library, shopping center, and a place of worship, as in past Aboriginal communities, people now live very compartmentalized lives.

Wheatley (2005) writes and teaches about humanizing our organizations and helping people to work together more effectively and compassionately. She believes that in an era of increasingly complex problems and shrinking resources there is a simpler way to organize
human endeavour. The simpler way, according to Wheatley (2005), is demonstrated in daily life by “what we feel when we see people helping each other, when we feel creative, when we know we’re making a difference, when life feels purposeful” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 1). Wheatley has written on topics from leadership and management to education and raising children. She has built relationships with people in numerous countries and remote communities around the globe. Wheatley and Frieze (2011) teach that the most resilient and adaptive communities are those that utilize the diversity, strengths, and resources from within the community and its membership.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008), which have been adopted by the BC Ministry of Education, include the beliefs that “learning is relational” and that “learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors” (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. 1). The BC Ministry of Education has embedded these principles throughout the newly transformed curriculum and the Core Competencies. The Personal and Social Competency focuses on students’ identity and how they relate to the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society. It includes the ability “to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017b, para. 4).

Peer acceptance and friendships in the school setting contribute to feelings of belongingness to school, which is a key factor leading to academic motivation and success (Newman Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011). Larson and Richards (1991) state that as an individual goes through adolescence, his or her social interest shifts from the family to the peer group. Wentzel (2009) found that compared to those who lack positive peer relationships, adolescents who engage in positive peer relationships tend to have stronger and more adaptive
emotional well-being, self-beliefs, values of prosocial behaviours, social interactions, and a sense of inclusion and engagement in school. Similarly, Gallardo and Barrasa’s (2016) study of 447 students aged 11 to 16 years, indicated that peer acceptance and friendships within the class, had a positive impact on subsequent academic achievement.

Collins (2013) states that creating a sense of belonging in schools allows students to take their place more assertively as citizens of their communities and the world in which we live. Building skills in effective communication and practicing these skills in a safe environment such as the circle helps students of all abilities to feel included and that they have a voice (Collins, 2013). According to Canney and Byrne (2006), this is especially important for those with intellectual disabilities, as this process may not happen naturally. Often students with disabilities have low self-concept and are rejected by their peers thus leaving the individual with reduced opportunities to practice these skills through everyday interactions (Canney & Byrne, 2006).

When student comments and ideas are not only listened to, but also acted upon by teachers and the school, students gain a sense of empowerment and ownership of their school community (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012). Stanier (2009) found using a circle in his secondary history classroom provided a forum for building understanding and helped his students to connect emotionally. Wooster and Carson (1982) found, through circle time activities, that students learned to listen carefully and comment supportively on what was heard, social-interaction skills developed, perceptions broadened, communication became more efficient and a climate of greater trust developed as they became more open with one another and more understanding.

Based on the information above, it is crucial that we as a society slow down and begin focusing our energy on creating opportunities for all of our students to learn how to interact
positively with others, to build relationships, and to become more empathetic and accepting of others. Creating a ‘culture of conversation’, to restore a sense of belonging and to find meaningful ways for everyone to contribute, needs to be the focus (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010). Diverse opinions need to be welcomed and sufficient time needs to be scheduled for dialogue and the sharing of ideas. Many circle processes such as Circle Time, Talking Circles and check-ins are emerging as processes that embrace and teach traditional Aboriginal values which welcome all learners of all abilities (Wilson, P. & Wilson, S., 2000) and promote student participation, the development of self, acceptance of diversity, and building a sense of community (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Mosley, 1996; Stanier, 2009; Thompson, 2011).

Further research supporting the circle, as a tool for developing inclusion and acceptance, has been documented by Curry (1997), who found that circle time improved the behaviour of a child, previously isolated, to such a degree that she became a valued and accepted member of the class. Providing a warm, supportive, non-judgmental setting such as the circle assists in developing one’s self esteem (Housego & Burns, 1994) and leads to improved social and academic performance (Tew, 1998).

Wilbur et al. (2001) studied the application of talking circles to group process with college-level students, as part of a comprehensive alcohol and other drug prevention program at the University of Connecticut, in 1999. Wilbur et al.’s (2001) study provided qualitative findings, based on group member comments that support the group’s development of sense of community and the development of members’ listening and empathy skills. In these particular talking circles members were given time to sit quietly and ground themselves in the present, share any unresolved thoughts from the previous session, and then to share feelings toward and make connections to a particular prompt (Wilbur et al., 2001). Prompts included either a
particular concern shared by a group member or a secret pulled from a collection of anonymous personal experiences collected previously in a burden basket. Typical sessions lasted the 1½ hours of the meeting time. General circle processes such as the use of a facilitator, a talking stick, and rounds to allow opportunities for members to respond to the prompt, ask questions of others, or choose to pass were incorporated (Wilbur et al., 2001). At the end of the semester, students reflected on their overall experiences in the program as part of a required 15-page paper.

The students’ unsolicited comments concerning their talking circle experiences were coded and categorized by Wilbur et al. into the following nine themes: a) empathy skills, b) listening skills, c) expression of feelings, d) judgemental stereotypes, e) connectedness, f) acceptance or belonging, g) trust, h) making a difference or self-efficacy, and i) peer education. From these themes, Wilbur et al. (2001) concluded that “talking circles were effective in developing basic helping skills and a sense of community as well as providing a group experience that promoted self-awareness, personal growth, and self-efficacy (e.g., expression of feelings, connectedness, acceptance or belonging, trust, and making a difference)” (p. 379). Further, the interns developed “practical and interpersonal skills that resulted in their relying on one another, dealing honestly with one another on a feeling level, and providing a place for the development of a peer community” (Wilbur et al., 2001, p. 379). Other comments reflected the improved group dynamics in the talking circle as well as the students’ “feelings of being accepted; feeling secure, safe, and comfortable; their acceptance of diversity; and the development of trust in the circles” (Wilbur et al., 2001, p. 379).

In a study of college students, Hampton and Norman (1997), investigated aspects of student development that resulted from a community building process that included the use of talking circles. Participants included 8 upper-level psychology students and 1 graduate
counselling student (6 women and 3 men) who developed a peer-counselling program at their Canadian university. All 9 students had previous counselling experience. They had initiated the program due to a perceived need as well as a desire to gain practical experience to support their classroom learning (Hampton & Norman, 1997). The peer support team received training and continual supervision from faculty advisors and community experts.

At the end of the year, Hampton and Norman (1997) coded and analyzed data from tape-recorded interviews from all 9 participants. In the interviews participants were asked general questions to solicit the participants’ perspectives to their general experience as members of the peer support team. Participants were also asked to respond to more specific questions regarding whether they experienced a sense of community within the group (Hampton & Norman, 1997).

Students in Hampton and Norman’s (1997) study reported that their experience of community within the peer support team had contributed to their personal and professional development. According to student comments, aspects that contributed to this sense of community included that they felt accepted and safe, experienced a sense of belonging, and that they had a role that was valued in the university community (Hampton & Norman, 1997). Greater respect for both individual and cultural differences emerged as a defining criterion of student development. Students felt they had actually developed an appreciation for diversity through listening to each other, learning to empathize, and appreciating each other’s strengths and struggles (Hampton & Norman, 1997). The peer group felt that through community building and the group’s conscious effort to establish a sense of equality between members of the peer support team and the members of the university community that visited the program center, was a key factor that led to the success of the program. Participants in the group reflected on their increased sense of commitment to a greater purpose, improved counselling skills, and increased
collegiality and interdependence (Hampton & Norman, 1997). Although participants in this study were introduced to a variety of community building activities, Hampton and Norman (1997) state students reported, “their most important tool was the talking circle” (p. 360). The talking circles provided an opportunity for members to engage in honest emotional sharing, to take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings without placing blame, to listen with acceptance, and to not take responsibility for other people’s pain. Other group dynamics the students reported were enhanced by the circle included communication, conflict resolution, cooperation, collaboration, self-determination, and empowerment. Furthermore, after experiencing community as part of the peer support team, participants “demonstrated the ability and desire to expand, create, and recreate positive communities, which [Hampton and Norman believe] would benefit the vision of creative community within colleges” (Hampton & Norman, 1997, p.363).

In *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (2010), Baldwin and Linnea share examples from their own experiences in promoting circle process around the world to demonstrate how a group of people can become a community willing to listen, let go, and speak from the heart. Other examples demonstrate how the circle process “can hold great depth, survive and resolve long-standing conflicts, provide a space for healing, and then reshape into an efficient, peer-led, agenda-based meeting” (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010, p. 9). Baldwin and Linnea (2010) also found that after people experienced the community building aspects of the circle, they adopted circles into their own lives and shared them within their own organizations.

**Benefits of Circle Time in Schools (Case Studies)**

The following case studies demonstrate how students can improve their personal and social skills through interacting in classroom based group processes. Two of these studies
evaluate student and teacher perceptions of circle time and look at its effectiveness for improving personal and social skills. The third study demonstrates how providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to contribute to a group process can lead to students developing active listening skills, vocabulary, and awareness, and extending feelings and developing social skills. These studies have been chosen to demonstrate how circle time has been used in schools, to demonstrate how circle time can build relationships and improve classroom behaviours, and to provide direction for future studies into the benefits of circle time in secondary schools.

**Case study 1: Perceptions of teachers and pupils.** Lown (2002) evaluated the use of ‘circle time’, in one local education authority in the United Kingdom by exploring teacher and student perceptions regarding three issues. The issues were: a) the impact of circle time on personal and social skills, b) participant’s feelings about the process of circle time, and c) any relationships between the perceived impact of circle time and the variables within its implementation (such as length of time using circle time, frequency and location of sessions, and number of adults participating in the circle). Schools selected for the study had been part of a circle time training program, led by Lown, and had used circle time for at least one term.

In Lown’s (2002) illuminative study, responses were collected from 9 teacher questionnaires, 18 student questionnaires, and 3 primary teacher interviews. Both teacher and student perceptions of the impact of circle time were found to be positive. Teachers’ responses supported the view that pupil listening skills improve within the context of circle time and that children’s cooperative skills, self-esteem, turn-taking skills, and ability to express feelings also improve as a result of circle time sessions (Lown, 2002). Eight out of 9 teachers reported that they enjoyed circle time and would continue to use it in the future, if given the opportunity (Lown, 2002). Sixteen students felt circle time had helped them to get to know each other better.
Pupils in the study reported they enjoyed the sessions and some felt it should be included in all grades. Suggestions from teachers in the study included the idea that circle time could be more effective if implemented in the beginning of the school year, as teachers who had used it for longer became more comfortable with the process and their students tended to report it as more beneficial (Lown, 2002). Teachers who had another adult participating in the circle also reported a more positive impact (Lown, 2002).

Several limitations of Lown’s (2002) study are worth highlighting. First, the small size of the sample, the voluntary nature of the teacher questionnaires, and the subjectivity of responses prevents generalization of findings to other educational authorities within the UK or other countries. The fact that teachers volunteered to complete the questionnaire could imply that only those in favour of circle time responded and having Lown conduct the interviews could have pressured participants to respond more favourably. Second, specific information on the schools and the age of student participants, the wording and language of the questions, and the activities implemented within the circle time meetings was not reported in Lown’s (2002) study. Third, the fact that teachers involved in the study had received training in addressing the emotional and behavioural needs of children, and that an educational psychologist was available to support and guide teachers in the facilitation of circle time, could have led to more positive results. It is not clear whether the results were due to the circle time meetings or whether they were due to the teachers’ training, attitudes, and teaching style.

Despite these limitations, Lown’s (2002) study provided strong evidence that both student and teacher participants perceived the social aspects of circle time to be of benefit to students. It highlighted the need for future studies regarding the specific activities implemented
within the circle framework and studies to determine if improvements in behaviour and social skills lead to improved classroom learning conditions or improved academic achievement.

**Case study 2: Circle time as a support to social skills development.** A study by Canney and Byrne (2006) explored the potential of Circle Time as a support to social skills development for students with mild intellectual disability in a small class setting. All 15 teachers in the school were given training on the philosophy and rationale of Mosley’s Circle Time (Mosley, 1993) and were encouraged to introduce it in their classes and to use it on a weekly basis. The school ratio of boys to girls in the population was 3:1 and each class size was 11 students.

A questionnaire was given to each teacher at the end of the term. Canney and Byrne (2006) also interviewed two teachers, who had received an extra six researcher-led Circle Time sessions. Questions covered themes such as the number and frequency of sessions, perceptions of the class response to Circle Time, best features, and teacher views of Circle Time as a support to social skills. Teachers were also asked if they would continue to use Circle Time.

Results from the 8 returned questionnaires, out of 15 distributed, indicated that those who had used Circle Time most frequently had the most positive views of it (Canney & Byrne, 2006). Although teachers’ views on the class response were mixed, all teachers responded that they would continue to use it in the future as a method for promoting social skills development (Canney & Byrne, 2006). Other comments and suggestions included the need for teacher support in setting up the initial sessions and in providing regular, on-going peer support for teachers to share successes, ideas, and possible solutions for those having difficulty (Canney & Byrne, 2006). Although some students were very positive about Circle Time and showed an ability to listen to each other, there was concern that others with greater emotional and
behavioural difficulties were reluctant and may not have understood the purpose of the sessions (Canney & Byrne, 2006). This raised the point that Circle Time activities need to be designed to match the cognitive functioning, attention, and self-esteem of the group, and should be adapted as skills improve (Canney & Byrne, 2006).

The unique characteristics of the student population in Canney and Byrne’s (2006) study prevent generalization of the findings. Also, the voluntary nature of the small sample selected raised questions about the non-participating teachers’ views. Other factors affecting Circle Time such as teaching style, teacher attitudes, content, frequency, and activities taught during sessions should also be considered as these factors threaten the validity of Canney and Byrne’s (2006) study. However, Canney and Byrne’s (2006) study does provide support for Circle Time as a method for delivering social skills development in a school setting. This suggests that teachers and students should become more comfortable with the method in order to benefit from it. Teachers should research the training and support they need in order to properly tailor activities and deliver an effective program that is appropriate to the needs of their specific population.

Suggestions for future studies could include an exploration of a whole school approach over a longer duration and with a more structured framework for each session or a similar exploration in a public school setting or of an older age group.

**Case study 3: Developing capacity for social and emotional growth.** In an action research project by Doveston (2007), children, their teacher and an advisory teacher collaborated with Doveston as co-researchers to improve working relationships in the classroom. The 24 children, aged 7 to 9, were from low socio-economic backgrounds. The students had difficulties in working and playing together and they had a range of learning and emotional, social, and behavioural difficulties.
The core skills Doveston’s (2007) group of co-researchers focused on were developing active listening skills, vocabulary and awareness, extending feelings, and developing social skills. Doveston and the teacher used modelling and role-play in paired activities to demonstrate and allow students to practice active listening. To promote co-operation, sessions included carefully chosen group challenges that allowed the group to focus on having fun together while also working on specific co-operative skills (Doveston, 2007).

Data on the students’ affective listening skills was collected through recorded structured peer interviews (Doveston, 2007). Responses were analysed and levelled at the beginning and end of the project, two months later. Results indicated an increase in levels of listening skills and an overall reduction in the number of low-level responses. According to Doveston (2007), improvements in feedback and body language signified that students were less self-conscious and increased student questioning was due to improved confidence. Student feedback at the end of the term demonstrated a greater awareness of the importance of active listening (Doveston, 2007). Doveston (2007) also reported that students had gained an appreciation of active listening as a transferable life skill, since they reported using it at home and in the playground.

To evaluate co-operative skills students were asked, at the end of each session, to reflect on what they noticed about the ways they had worked together. In individual interviews at the end of the project, students rated the class as excellent or good, but in self-assessments scores were lower at the end of the study (Doveston, 2007). Doveston (2007) attributed this to increased pupil perception and critical evaluation of the skills needed to work in a group. Comments from students showed an awareness of increased helping behaviours within the group and the teacher reported that students worked very well in groups and students no longer argued.
The teacher also found that she became more aware of her own use of positive language in the classroom (Doveston, 2007).

Doveston’s (2007) findings support the idea that speaking and listening skills can be taught through the use of teacher modelling, role-play, and group activities, and as students practice effective communication within group settings, they will be able to co-operate better with others.

Some concerns regarding Doveston’s (2007) project should be highlighted. The results cannot be generalized as Doveston studied only one specific class for only one term. Higher levels in listening during peer interviews could be attributed to familiarization in the process, due to the initial testing experience. This was supported by a low, level 1 response received by a student who had missed the initial testing. Results indicated a significant improvement in listening skills, but the data signified that only 10 pupils improved their response level. To give a more in-depth result, further research could explore the effects over a longer period of time, or study the effect on a larger, higher functioning, or older student sample.

Conclusion

Circles have been used for many years to allow groups to share ideas, to build social skills such as listening and speaking respectfully, and to create a sense of community by developing empathy and understanding of others. The structure of the circle is familiar to everyone, as it has been used almost instinctually at some time in each person’s life.

The circle has been shown to be a successful method for teaching and developing social and emotional skills in elementary students, and to build belonging in college and university students. Circles have been used in some secondary classrooms for promoting whole class discussions (Stanier, 2009) and small group problem solving sessions (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg,
Despite this, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to circles being used in secondary schools for the purpose of developing social and emotional skills or for promoting the value of diversity, student voice, human connections, and building responsibility.

The author of the present study believed circle check-ins should be used in secondary schools to create safe, supportive environments for students to practice speaking in front of others, to talk about emotions and experiences, to learn to listen respectfully without comment or judgement, and to hear what others feel and experience in order to make connections to their own experiences. She also felt circle check-ins could provide a venue for students to recognize similarities between themselves and their peers and see the value in different opinions and beliefs. The author hoped that her study, which explored the effect of Circle Time Check-Ins on the social responsibility levels of Grade 8 students, would begin to fill these gaps.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Description of the Research Design

In this action research study the researcher (author of the present study) was interested in whether the use of a treatment, Circle Time Check-Ins, would lead to an improvement in the social responsibility levels of the students in a Grade 8 class. Students in the class were given a pretest survey at the start of September to determine their level on the construct of ‘social responsibility’. Then, the treatment was introduced from September to November, where all students were included in weekly Circle Time Check-Ins as a part of their one-hour advisory class. At the end of the treatment, students were given the same survey again to determine their posttest levels of social responsibility. Although all students in the class participated in the Circle Time Check-Ins and completed both surveys, only the data from students who consented to be participants in the sample was analysed in the present study. Individual student posttest scores were tallied for each participant and were compared to the scores received on the initial assessment. The sample group’s mean scores before and after the treatment were also analysed to determine the degree of improvement in students’ reported social responsibility levels.

Description of the Treatment

The treatment used in the present study was a weekly Circle Time Check-In (see Appendix A for additional guidelines). To set up a Circle Time Check-In, students cleared space in the classroom and arranged their chairs to sit in a circle facing inward. The teacher acted as facilitator by providing a question or prompt for students to respond to. Students were each given an opportunity to either respond to the prompt or to share any thoughts or feelings they were experiencing in their day. Students were also allowed to ‘pass’ if they did not wish to contribute. Students were instructed to be respectful, to listen attentively, to be positive and open
to the ideas of others, and to refrain from negative comments or judgments of others. Once everyone in the circle, including the teacher, had been given an opportunity to speak, the teacher then asked if anyone had anything else to contribute or if there was something they’d like to discuss further. Topics for discussion included respect, diversity, empathy and community, and any other topics or problems the students felt were important to discuss. Some of the circle time sessions started or ended with games and activities to promote interaction between students and a mixing of social groups or student pairings.

**Description of the Sample**

**Potential participant population.** The potential participant population for this study consisted of students in Grade 8 at Frances Kelsey Secondary School in Mill Bay, BC. FKSS is a Grade 8 to 12 school with approximately 950 full-time students. Students in Grade 8 meet as an advisor group, with their advisory teacher, for 15 minutes each morning in order to set daily goals, to monitor progress, to communicate any messages to or from home, and to hear the daily announcements. Grade 8 students also meet for a one-hour advisory class at the start of each week. In addition to the morning tasks, this time is used for creating a support group to assist students in their transition into secondary school. It can also provide students with an adult to whom they may connect or that they may use as an advocate on their behalf. Advisory teachers also guide students “to become responsible for, and to assume the self-direction of, their own education” (*Frances Kelsey Secondary School Student Handbook*, 2017).

**Recruitment of the sample.** The author of the present study was a teacher at FKSS at the time of the study. A recruitment letter (see Appendix B for the letter used) was sent home with each student in two Grade 8 advisory classes during the first week of school in September. The letter explained the purpose of the study, how participants’ identities would be kept
anonymous, how results would be used and shared, and how each participant’s results would be kept anonymous and confidential. From the group of 60 students, the author of the present study expected a 60% participation rate for the sample. To be included in the sample student participants had to be willing to complete both surveys, be in attendance during the period of the study and, along with their parent/guardian, complete a consent form. A research assistant was used for the collection of consent forms in order to keep sample participants anonymous.

**Description of the Instruments Used**

Participants completed a survey of 21 questions adapted from the BC Ministry of Education’s “Citizenship and Social Responsibility Survey” (BC Ministry of Education, 2017a). Permission was obtained by the author of the present study from the BC Ministry of Education. Questions relating to citizenship and politics were omitted and only questions relating to the construct of ‘social responsibility’ were used for the survey in the present study. The adapted 3-part Social Responsibility Survey (see Appendix C for the survey used) asked participants the level to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements, how they would behave in certain situations, and how often they participated in a specific set of activities.

In the first part of the survey, students were asked to respond to 8 opinion statements, using a 10-point Visual Analogue Scale, by placing a mark between ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Agree’ (10). In the second part, students were asked 4 multiple-choice questions which asked them to consider how they would act in a given situation. Scores for the multiple-choice responses were scaled from least socially responsible (1) to most socially responsible (5) and included the choice ‘Other’, which allowed space for students to write their own response. The third part of the study included 9 questions that asked students to place a mark, on a Visual Analogue Scale, in the location that matched how often they would engage in a particular
activity or behaviour when given the opportunity. This scale ranged from ‘No Time’ (1) to ‘All of the Time’ (10) and also included the choice ‘Not Applicable’, which omitted the question from the scoring for that student. Each student’s mean score for the 21-question survey was calculated to produce a reported score for each individual on the construct of ‘social responsibility’.

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

The sample group was obtained through the use of a recruitment letter sent home with all students in two Grade 8 advisory classes during the first week of September 2017. Students and their parents/guardians were asked to read about the study, as well as the details of ‘informed consent’, and sign whether they would or would not give their consent/assent to participation in the study. Forms were then submitted to the head secretary at FKSS and kept confidential for the research assistant, in a locked drawer in the main office at FKSS.

Survey questionnaires were administered to all students in the classes by the end of the first week in September. All students were given time to fill in the survey quietly at their desks and although they were expected to complete the survey for classroom purposes, they were reminded that only those surveys belonging to students providing their consent would be used in the study. The advisory teacher began the treatment, Circle Time Check-Ins, in the second week of September during the students’ one-hour advisory class. The treatment continued weekly for a period of 2 months. The same survey process was repeated at the end of the study, in November 2017. Students were reminded that by completing and submitting a consent/assent form, as well as both pre- and posttest surveys, they were providing their consent to participate in the study.
Once all of the consent forms were turned in to the office and collected by the research assistant, the sample participants' survey results were recorded. Students participating in the study were given a number to match them to their results. The identification key and results were kept secure in a locked file in the school’s main office. The key was used by the research assistant only for the purpose of matching individual participants’ scores before and after the study and was shredded, along with the results, once both sets of scores had been obtained.

**Discussion of Validity**

The validity of this study was strengthened through the use of a research assistant in collecting consent forms and compiling sample results, and through the use of questions adapted from the BC Ministry of Education (2017a) survey. The low number of questions and the simple answering methods used in the survey made it easier for more students to complete the survey in the time permitted. This reduced the chance of instrument decay, as students were less likely to lose focus and submit incomplete surveys.

Due to the nature of action research, the selection of students for the sample group was by convenience, as a random selection of students would not have been appropriate in the present study. Consideration of a control group was also rejected, as the author of the present study determined it was unethical to deny a potentially positive treatment to one group of students while simultaneously favouring the other.

**Discussion and Justification of the Statistical Techniques Used**

Data collected and analysed in the present study was quantitative in nature. Each questionnaire provided a mean score for the construct of ‘social responsibility’. Individual participants’ mean scores on the pretest were compared to their mean scores on the posttest. The sample group’s overall mean score was also compared pre- and posttest. For interpretation of
results, it was stated a priori, that a 2 – 5% improvement in social responsibility level would be deemed minimally meaningful, a 6 – 9% improvement would be deemed meaningful, and an improvement of 10% or greater would be considered very meaningful. Any improvement below 2% was considered not meaningful.

Students’ mean scores were compared using MS Excel graphing software. A bar graph and a line graph were used to illustrate individual changes in pretest and posttest levels. A frequency polygon was constructed to illustrate changes in the group’s levels of improvement. A pie chart was created to show the percent of participants in each of the categories ‘not meaningful’, ‘minimally meaningful’, ‘meaningful’, and ‘very meaningful’ in respect to the degree of improvement in their social responsibility levels. Finally, Box Plots were selected as appropriate for graphically demonstrating the degree of improvement between pretest and posttest scores across the sample group. These Box Plots illustrated the spread of scores across the group and also any change to the distribution and median scores for both pretest and posttest.

The bar graph, line graph, frequency polygon, Box Plot, and pie chart were presented to illustrate the degree of improvement, if any, of the students’ level of social responsibility.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the present study was to add to the field of research on circle time use in secondary schools and on the use of Circle Time Check-Ins in secondary schools for creating a sense of belonging and improving students’ social and emotional skills. The present study sought to determine specifically the degree to which the use of weekly Circle Time Check-Ins in a Grade 8 classroom would lead to improved social responsibility levels, as reported by the students. To do this, the author analysed individual student mean scores on the construct of ‘social responsibility’ before and after a treatment period as well as the pre- and posttest scores across the sample group.

From a Grade 8 class of 25 students, 15 students’ pre- and posttest scores were used as sample data in this study. Of the remaining 10 students, 5 refused to give consent and 5 students’ data could not be used as the students were either absent on the pre- or posttest days, did not hand in a completed survey, or the data was voided as no identification number (student number) was provided by the student to match pre- and posttest scores. A mean score out of 5 was calculated for each student in the sample from their pretest surveys. These scores, rounded to the nearest hundredth, were then ordered from least to greatest and assigned a letter to correspond to the individual for the purpose of comparing posttest mean scores for each individual while also protecting participant anonymity.

Individual Student Mean Scores

Table 4.1 contains the mean score each individual student in the sample received on their pre- and posttest surveys as well as the difference between each individual’s scores. Table 4.1 also includes the degree of improvement, calculated by finding the change (out of 5) as a percent, for each individual student. On analysis, 7 student’s scores increased after the treatment. One
student had a ‘very meaningful’ improvement and 2 students had ‘meaningful’ improvements.

The remaining students’ improvements were either considered ‘not meaningful’ or decreased after the treatment period.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pretest ( /5)</th>
<th>Posttest ( /5)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Degree of Improvement (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>-13.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>7.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
<td>-18.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>-11.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Student scores arranged from lowest to highest according to pretest. Positive changes (difference) and improvements denoted by bold font. Degree of improvement was considered ‘very meaningful’ if ≥10%, ‘meaningful’ if 6-9%, ‘minimally meaningful’ if 2-5%, and ‘not meaningful’ for improvements <2%.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the students’ individual change between pretest and posttest social responsibility levels in a bar graph. Pretest scores are shown on the left and posttest on the right for each student. Figure 4.2 illustrates the same data in the form of a line graph. Although these graphs illustrate that several students’ levels did improve on the posttest, it is also clear that several decreased. Figure 4.3 was included to demonstrate the degree of improvement at each
level of ‘meaningfulness’ as determined a priori in chapter 3. The circle graph demonstrates that for 80% of the sample, the treatment did not have a meaningful effect on improving students’ reported social responsibility levels.

Figure 4.1. Bar graph comparison of individual students’ pretest and posttest social responsibility levels. This bar graph illustrates the variation in each student’s social responsibility levels before and after the weekly Circle Time Check-Ins.
Figure 4.2. Line graph comparison of individual students’ pretest and posttest social responsibility levels. Variation between each student’s social responsibility levels before and after the weekly Circle Time Check-Ins is illustrated in this line graph.

Figure 4.3. Meaningfulness of individual student improvement as calculated by the percent rate of improvement. This chart demonstrates the percent of participants in each of the categories of ‘meaningfulness’. 
Scores Across the Group

Changes across the sample were also analysed and, as shown in Table 4.2, demonstrate an overall decrease in students’ social responsibility scores. The mean score for the sample was 3.69 on the pretest and 3.58 on the posttest, which was a decrease of 0.11 (-2.20%). Similarly, a Box-plot demonstrated that the majority of scores across the sample were lower on the posttest, as shown in Figure 4.4. However, the author of the present study did recognise that both the lowest score on the posttest and the highest score on the posttest improved in comparison to the pretest. The frequency polygon in Figure 4.5 illustrates changes in the group’s social responsibility levels at various intervals of social responsibility. A slight improvement can be seen in the number of students scoring above 3.5 in social responsibility. Ten students scored within the intervals from 3.5 to 5 on the pretest and 11 students scored within these higher levels on the posttest.

Table 4.2

Sample’s Mean Pretest and Posttest Social Responsibility Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample n=15</th>
<th>Pretest (/5)</th>
<th>Posttest (/5)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Degree of Improvement (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4. Box-plot of sample’s pretest and posttest levels. This figure illustrates the pretest and posttest social responsibility levels across the sample. Minimum, maximum, and median
scores are labelled as well as the first and third quartile scores for both the pretest and the posttest data.

Figure 4.5. Frequency polygon of social responsibility levels. This is to illustrate students within specific interval levels of social responsibility.

Summary

Based on the data provided from mean scores calculated on pre- and posttest surveys, the author of the present study found the use of weekly Circle Time Check-Ins did not improve students’ social responsibility levels, as reported by students. A discussion of reasons why the author felt there was no effect can be found in chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Summary of the Study and Results

The intent of the current study was to help students in Grade 8 to build positive relationships and to become kinder, more empathetic, cooperative, and socially responsible citizens. The specific purpose of the present study was to determine whether the use of weekly Circle Time Check-Ins in Grade 8 would lead to the improvement of social responsibility levels in students. The author of the present study’s personal interest in creating a more welcoming environment for students in secondary school and to promote positive interactions between students was a motivating factor in the creation of the present study. Her own profound experience with Circle Time Check-Ins in the beginning of her Masters journey led her to try it in her own classroom and to make it the focus of her research. Additionally, finding research that supported the circle as a successful method for teaching and developing social and emotional skills in elementary students (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Curry, 1997; Collins, 2013; Lown, 2002; Stanier, 2009; Wooster & Carson, 1982) and for build belonging in college and university students (Hampton & Norman, 1997; Wilbur et al., 2001), and further research which demonstrated the positive relationship between peer acceptance, friendships, and future academic achievement (Gallardo & Barrasa, 2016; Newman Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011) were other factors that strengthened the author of the present study’s interest in examining Circle Time Check-Ins.

The data for the current study was collected over a four-month period from September to December 2017. Students were recruited for the sample, in September 2017, through both a verbal and written invitation from the author of the present study. All students in the class completed surveys and participated in Circle Time Check-Ins, but only the data from students
who signed assent forms and whose parent/guardians signed consent forms was used in this study. Permission was obtained from both the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board and School District 79 (Cowichan).

Results of the 2017 quantitative data showed that from a sample of 15 students’ pre- and posttest surveys, 7 students’ social responsibility levels improved. The improvement in social responsibility was ‘very meaningful’ in 1 student, ‘meaningful’ in 2 students, and ‘not meaningful’ in the remaining 4. However, 8 of the 15 students scored lower on the construct of ‘social responsibility’ on their posttest survey when compared to their pretest survey scores. Based on this data, the use of weekly Circle Time Check-Ins in a Grade 8 classroom, did not lead to an improvement in social responsibility levels in students.

**Discussion of Results**

The author of the present study hypothesized that by introducing weekly Circle Time Check-Ins, students’ social responsibility would improve. However, due to the quantitative nature of the data, it is unclear what led to the rejection of the hypothesis in the present study. After reflecting on the sessions with the teacher of the class several factors were presented that may have had an effect on the results of this study. These included how often the Circle Time Check-Ins were facilitated, the content of the discussions, the confidence of the teacher facilitating the Check-Ins, and other external factors in the students’ lives that could have influenced their responses on the pre- or posttest surveys.

**Timing.** Due to the timetable and structure of the Grade 8 advisor class in the present study, Circle Time Check-Ins occurred every second week. This prevented Check-In from being a regular weekly event for the students, which may have resulted in it having less impact or possibly becoming a distraction from the regular routine rather than part of the expectation of
students. Students may have developed ways of interacting and behaving that were not conducive to or productive within the parameters of the circle. Fewer Circle Time Check-Ins each month meant the study continued into December. According to feedback from the teacher in this study, students began to form friendships and cliques near the end of the second month (October). Rude, discourteous behaviour from two of the students in the class disrupted the environment in the circle and was difficult for the teacher to correct while attempting to remain supportive and non-judgemental in the circle. The two students were temporarily removed from Circle Time Check-In sessions, but remained in the room as observers. This may have had a negative impact on other students’ levels of trust, the depth of their sharing, their tolerance, and their ability to accept and value each other’s differences as strengths.

**Content.** Generally the content of the Circle Time Check-Ins was kept light and did not involve structured lessons, discussions, videos or other teaching aids, on topics such as personal responsibility, racism, equality, empathy, belonging, or on how to recognize and share feelings and emotions. The content of these basic Circle Time Check-Ins was shaped by the prompts provided from the advisor teacher and the experiences and thoughts shared in response by the students. In the first couple of sessions the circle was structured into two circles, an inner and an outer one. Students on the outer circle sat opposite a classmate on the inner circle. Students interviewed each other by asking each other non-threatening questions such as their name, their elementary school, the number of siblings they have, and what they did over the summer. Students were also encouraged to ask a question of their own interest. Students were then given an opportunity to introduce the person they spoke with to the group and to share the information they learned. When time permitted another round of interviews and share-outs occurred. Later Circle Time Check-Ins involved questions that the facilitating teacher termed, ‘stars and wishes’.
These prompts included questions such as, ‘What’s going well for you this month and what would you change?’ ‘What’s good about this school and what’s something you would change?’ and ‘What do you like about being in high school and what do you not like or wish you could change?’

According to the author of the present study, if these sessions were more structured and had led into further discussions on acceptance, how students felt about having their stories shared, or how they felt when others disrupted them when sharing, they may have had a more positive impact. This was consistent to the findings of Canney and Byrne (2006) and Lown (2002) who suggested activities needed to be specifically chosen and structured into the circle time sessions. Also, if students were given the opportunity in the circle to suggest improvements for the school and to come up with a plan to share their suggestions with the student body or student council, the Circle Time Check-Ins may have had a greater or more empowering impact consistent to Hampton and Norman (1997) and Wilbur et al.’s (2001) studies.

Facilitator confidence. The author of the present study had hoped to study her own class for the purposes of this research, but due to a change of teaching positions leading up to the study, it was not possible and a change needed to be made. As a result, the advisor teacher who volunteered for the present study had no prior experience with facilitating or participating in Circle Time Check-Ins. The advisor teacher was provided with an explanation of the study and was asked to read both Chapter 3 in the present study and Appendix A - Additional Guidelines for Implementing Circle Time Check-Ins. The author of the present study felt this would strengthen the validity of the study, as it would also test how well the study could be replicated. The advisor teacher discussed her understanding of the process and her plans for the first few sessions, with the author of the present study, prior to facilitating the Circle Time Check-Ins.
External factors. Other factors which may have impacted the students’ responses to the survey questions could include an eagerness to please (in early September), a more critical self-reflection at the end of the study after gaining a greater awareness of what it means to be socially responsible, or an increase in judgemental views or criticism of others due to the social pressures of high school. Students may have rated themselves more positively when answering the questions in September or they may not have fully understood what was meant in the questions or statements. They may have been tired in December when responding to the survey or they may have judged themselves more critically after learning what it means to be respectful and inclusive of others. It is even possible that students’ views became more self-centred due to the struggles of fitting in and of establishing new peer groups in secondary school and these views may have influenced their responses during the posttest survey.

Limitations

The author of the present study also hypothesized that students would become more aware of others and more empathetic and respectful toward their peers, themselves, and the adults in the school environment. Students in the present study would become more confident and comfortable sharing opinions and working collaboratively. Due to the quantitative nature of the study it is unclear whether these hypotheses were supported (proved or disproved). The quantitative nature of the data in the present study restricted the information that could be attained. Students’ opinions regarding their experience with Circle Time Check-Ins, their perceived confidence levels, and their thoughts about themselves and others were not available to the author/researcher. There was also no data presented regarding changes in the students’ behaviour toward others. Although the survey used in the present study was adapted from a BC Ministry of Education published document, the questions were not field tested on Grade 8
students at Frances Kelsey Secondary School prior to implementation. It is possible that the questions used were not strong indications of social responsibility level.

Relying on another teacher to facilitate the Circle Time Check-Ins limited the author’s ability to design sessions with content tailored to the needs of the specific individuals in the Grade 8 class. Sessions could not be observed or adjusted by the author of the present study during the treatment period. Implementing the study in the first few months of the school year did not allow the teacher facilitating the treatment much time to plan the sessions, get familiar with the process, or to learn what the students might need in order to get the greatest outcome from the Circle Time Check-in process.

Other limitations were that the present study only looked at the results for one class of Grade 8 students, in one particular secondary school, led by one advisor teacher. The class was chosen by convenience and so the results cannot be generalized to other populations of students. It is possible that other teacher facilitators could have had differing results with Circle Time Check-Ins and that another group of students in any particular grade could have responded differently to the survey questions and also to the treatment. Use of a control group would have been beneficial to this study as well, however, the author of the present study determined it would be unethical to deny a potentially positive treatment to one group of students while simultaneously favouring the other. Furthermore, the study also only allowed for eight Circle Time Check-In sessions to occur. It is possible that if the study continued over a longer period of time the teacher may have gained greater confidence and could have designed her prompts to solicit more meaningful discussions within the sessions. The students, as a result of more sessions, could have become more comfortable sharing and as a result of this, and the more tailored discussions, could have responded in a way that resulted in a higher level of social
responsibility on the posttest. Due to these limitations, results of the present study cannot be
generalized to other populations.

Implications and Recommendations

It is clear that the structure of the circle format alone will not lead to improvements in
students’ social responsibility levels. Careful consideration must be given to what content is
introduced, as mentioned by Canney and Byrne (2006) and Lown (2002), and how students can
be encouraged to think more deeply. Utilizing prompts such as video clips that lead students to
think beyond their own lives and to consider another perspective may have the desired impact.
Providing opportunities for students to consider the struggles some people face in life and to
celebrate the ways that humans persevere and come together may also lead to an understanding
of empathy, as suggested by Wheatley and Frieze (2011). Similarly a discussion to highlight
people’s unique talents, personalities, and achievements could lead to an awareness of how
diversity can enrich our school community and society beyond our school.

Although the author of the present study made a conscious decision not to interfere with
the research process by micromanaging the advisor teacher’s lessons, greater involvement may
have led to more desirable results. In retrospect, she would have liked to meet up with the
advisor teacher in the present study more regularly to reflect on what was going well, what could
be improved upon, and to gather and organise content and prompts which may have encouraged
the students to think about their own ways of behaving and interacting with others and the
environment around them, and to stretch them to think beyond themselves. Another suggestion
would have been to promote the students’ voices by having them take on a class project and
sharing or presenting their ideas with others in the school.
The decrease in student responsibility levels implies that there are other factors influencing student beliefs and values while transitioning into and navigating through secondary school. While some students may have lacked the confidence to share honest, more personal thoughts in the circle format, there also appears to be a strong force that shifts some students to think and behave in ways that oppose teachers’ efforts to create welcoming, non-judgemental spaces. This has motivated the author to encourage other secondary teachers (as well as herself) to do more activities focussed around creating an environment for students to build positive connections with others, expand their personal confidence and social awareness, and to improve their social skills. The author of the present study was intrigued by the data presented in the present study and is interested in pursuing Circle Time Check-In further with her own Grade 9-12 advisor class. She has learned the importance of making a conscious effort to teach the skills and to present students with lessons to build the skills and behaviours she desires for them.

The author of the present study has also learned to think of the specific information attained in a study and the limitations of quantitative data when designing research. She hopes that other teachers and researchers will look for ways to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data when examining potential growth and learning in students. With the present study, a checklist of sorts regarding levels of acceptance within the group, cooperative student behaviour, speaking, and listening ability for the advisor teacher to make observations on, before and after the study, would have provided further data on the effect of Circle Time Check-Ins on students’ social responsibility levels. Open-ended questions for the students themselves on what they thought went well or what they felt they learned and also what they felt could be improved upon could have provided further insight.
Suggestions for Further Research

Further research into the effects of a more structured Circle Time Check-In and other methods for teaching social responsibility in secondary schools is needed. A study of Circle Time Check-In’s effect on Grade 10-12 students would be of particular interest to the present author, as these students may have greater confidence in sharing in richer, more personal, and meaningful conversations. A study over a longer period of time and involving both quantitative and qualitative data would be the most beneficial.

Future studies could be done on the effects of circle discussions for building a sense of belonging in secondary students and to look at what methods/structures secondary students of different cultures, backgrounds, or genders find the most supportive and beneficial for promoting student participation and reducing barriers to honest dialogue. Including a number of secondary schools across multiple districts would produce the greatest insight.

Final Thoughts

Teaching students to learn how to interact positively with others, to build relationships, trust, and understanding, and to become more empathetic and accepting of others is needed so that students can work cooperatively and respectfully with classmates of all abilities and backgrounds. Youth joining the workforce will be expected to work and communicate with people from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, and diverse backgrounds. They will need to have been taught, been able to practice, and also to have attained the right skills and attitudes. Students need to be able to recognize that they each have strengths and a potential to contribute positively to the world in which they live. Too many misunderstandings exist that are based on differences of opinion and different cultural values. Opportunities are needed to pull people together, to focus instead on the things that make us the same at our core. Through sharing who
we are and why we are, we can develop understanding and lead to not only accepting diversity, but appreciating and embracing it. According to Wheatley (as cited in Baldwin & Linnea, 2010), welcoming those who are excluded, who never speak to power, or who feel they have nothing to say can be what provides a breakthrough idea or solution. Our society needs to get out of the darkness of isolation so that we can see we do not need to be strangers (Wheatley, as cited in Baldwin & Linnea, 2010). Circle discussions provide an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and to learn about the strengths of other cultures or communities.

In order to get to this our students must practice social interaction in their daily lives. They need to be able to experience how others react and hear what others think and feel. They need to be able to see the similarities that they share with others and learn to value the differences and recognize that they can also be strengths. Students need to be guided and supported. Teachers, parents and community members must interact respectfully with children, adolescents, and teens. Role models need to share their own stories of struggle, triumph, and curiosity and be open to listening to the children.

The circle provides a venue. Something about the circle is familiar to everyone and perhaps as it allows people a sense of comfort or ritual, this is why it allows some to participate more fully than in other arrangements (such as in a typical lecture style arrangement or classroom style with desks in rows). As previously discussed, there are many varieties and formats for the circle, but they all share the same basic structures. Everyone sits together as equals and no one is superior or better than anyone else. Everyone is given an opportunity to speak honestly. Members listen with intention and without interference or judgement.

Improving social responsibility by learning to work collaboratively, listen thoroughly, express thoughts and feelings clearly and with intention, and to communicate opinions and
beliefs are skills the author of the present study believes should be taught throughout secondary school. Circle talk or check-ins can be used in classrooms at any level to create a safe environment in which to teach relationship skills, enhance self-esteem and feelings of belonging, and build positive classroom behaviours. The author of the current study believes well planned Circle Time Check-Ins could support students transitioning from other schools, cultures, or communities and foster a more accepting and inclusive school community.

According to the author of the present study the use of circle check-in in schools and on circle use in secondary schools was lacking in the current body of research. The author hoped that the present study, which explores an effect of Circle Time Check-In on Grade 8 students, would begin to fill these gaps. It is evident that further research is needed.
References


Wentzel, K. R. (2009). Peers and academic functioning at school. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Social, emotional, and personality development in
context. Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups (pp. 531-547). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.


Appendix A

Additional Guidelines for Implementing Circle Time Check-Ins

Purpose:
- to give everyone an equal opportunity to speak and to be heard.
- to encourage people to share their opinions, ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- to promote listening and speaking skills.
- to promote an openness and an acceptance to new ideas and differing opinions.
- to create an awareness of other people’s feelings and beliefs.
- to learn about other people and build positive relationships.

Set Up:
- Clear a space in the classroom, outside, or in a hallway.
- All members of the group sit on chairs in a circle so that everyone can be seen and heard.
- Be creative in mixing students so they don’t always sit next to the same people.
- The teacher acts as a facilitator and also a participant by taking a turn in the discussion.

Expectations:
These should be discussed and agreed upon by all members of the circle during the first session. Generally the main expectations are:
- one person speaks at a time (a talking stick or other item can be passed around the circle).
- everyone is given an opportunity to speak or to say, “pass” if they choose.
- everyone must listen respectfully when someone else is speaking.
- there is no need to respond, although if conversation develops, the facilitator may choose to nurture it or steer the group back to the individual.
- be open to and aware of what others are expressing.

Procedure:
1. Review the expectations (if needed).
2. Present a question or prompt. Give students a moment to think of a response.
3. Anyone may begin by raising a hand to speak (pass the talking stick to him/her, if using one).
4. People take turns around the circle until everyone has had an opportunity to speak.
5. The facilitator can explore what was shared or use it as a lead in to a discussion on any aspect of social responsibility.

Circle Time Games and Mixers:
Many suggestions can be found online under the topics of ‘Circle Time Games and Activities’ and several activities found by searching ‘Cooperative Games’ or ‘Ice Breakers’ can also be adapted for Circle Time Check-ins. The idea is to create a fun, relaxed atmosphere and to allow students to mix and interact with others. Below are a few suggestions to try:
- Name Toss – Students say their own name, then name another student and toss them a soft item or ball. That person catches the item, thanks the passer by name, then calls another person and passes the item. Continue until everyone has had an opportunity to
catch the ball and it is passed back to the original person. This can be repeated and the
group timed to see how quickly (and safely) the ball can be passed around.

- **My name is...** - One person starts by saying, ‘My name is _________.’ The next person
  in the circle says, ‘My name is _________ and this is’ then names the previous person.
  Students continue around the circle adding each person’s name to the list until the starting
  person ends by naming everyone in the circle.

- **Fruit Salad** – Remove one chair from the circle, then have a ‘caller’ in the middle make a
  statement about him/herself such as, ‘I have a pet cat’ or ‘I have a brother’ or ‘I enjoy
  reading’. All students who agree must stand up and find a new chair (including the
  caller). The last person standing becomes the new ‘caller’. People cannot sit in the chair
  directly on either side of them.

- **Web of Unity** – A large ball of string or wool is tossed across the circle until everyone is
  ‘connected’. Students share something about themselves and then, ensuring they hold
  onto their section of the string, lob the roll to another person in the group. At the end the
  facilitator could start a discussion on how everyone is ‘connected’ as part of the group (or
  the larger groups of community or humanity) and that each of our actions affect the
  people around us.

**Suggested Discussion Prompts:**
These can be any length depending on the time permitted and the facilitator’s purpose for the
session. Some strategies could include:

- **One Word or Gesture** – ask students to choose one word that describes how they are each
  feeling (today or right now). In a second round have students explain why they chose
  that word or gesture.

- **Something I’ve enjoyed so far this year (or has been difficult, surprising, easy, etc.) and
  why.**

- **Personal Strengths** – Think of and share one positive personality trait for each student in
  the class (prior planning is needed before the Circle Time Check-in to ensure each
  student will be celebrated).

- **Video Prompt** – share a video clip demonstrating acts of kindness and ask students to
  share something they found encouraging, interesting, or surprising and explain why.

- **Circles of Strength** – students choose from a list or set of cards, one value they find is
  important and explain why. Prepare, or brainstorm with the class, a list of strengths such
  as honesty, openness, kindness, bravery, empathy, trustworthiness, etc. ahead of time.

- **Cooperative Skills** – after a group game or challenge, have students share what
  behaviours made the group successful and what skills the group could work to improve
  next time. Be cautious and ready to redirect any negative comments of others.

- **Image Prompts** – Provide a variety of visuals (online or in print) of positive personal
  interactions between people of different cultures, generations, genders, races, physical
  condition, socioeconomic status, etc. Ask students to choose one and share what they like
  about it, what positive feeling it depicts, or what they feel is ‘good’ about it.

**Correcting Undesirable Behaviour:**
Some students may have difficulty following the guidelines for Circle Time Check-ins. Rather
than create a negative feeling within the circle, a student should be removed and then welcomed
back when willing to correct their behaviour.
Appendix B - Recruitment Letter

Circle Time Check-ins in Secondary Schools:
A Classroom Approach to Improving Students’ Social Responsibility

Dear Student,

I am a Math teacher at Frances Kelsey Secondary School. Right now I am also ‘in school’ at Vancouver Island University (VIU), in Nanaimo. I am doing my Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership. To get a Master’s Degree, I have to do research and then write a paper called a Thesis. This fall I will be doing my research, and I will be asking for participants from your Grade 8 advisor class.

Today I am giving you several papers to take home to your parent/guardians. One is a Student Assent and Parent/Guardian Consent Form. This is the form that you and your parent/guardian will sign to say whether you are willing to participate and whether they will or will not allow you to participate in the study. There will be time for me to answer any of your questions and any questions your parent/guardian might have.

As a lifelong learner, I am always looking to improve my teaching practice. My research is to determine whether the use of a teaching method called Circle Time Check-ins will improve the social responsibility levels of Grade 8 students. To do this each of you will complete a survey to self-assess your level of social responsibility at the start of this month. Your teacher will then introduce you all to Circle Time Check-ins during your weekly long advisor. In November, you will each complete the self-assessment survey again.

Although everyone in the class will participate in the Circle Time Check-ins and complete both surveys, I will only use the results from students who have agreed to participate in my study and from whose parent/guardian I have received consent. From these participants, only the score on each survey will be analysed and used in my research. Participant names and identities will remain anonymous at all times and I will not know who is participating in the study. My research assistant, Michelle Webb, will record only the scores from those who choose to participate. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Whether or not you participate in my study, you will still be taught the class activities the same way as everyone else in your advisor class. Your grade will not be affected by whether you choose to allow me to use your survey results in my thesis.

Please ensure these papers, including the Student Assent and Parent/Guardian Consent Form, are passed along to your parent/guardian tonight. Your parent/guardian can contact me if there are any questions regarding my research or your participation in it. You may choose ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on the Student Assent Form and ask your parent/guardian to choose ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on the Parent/Guardian Consent Form regarding whether or not they give consent for you to participate, and then bring both the signed forms back to the secretary in the FKSS main office. Forms will be kept locked in the office and will only used by my research assistant in order to gather scores.

Thank you for allowing me to share my research with you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. C. Zimmer
Parent/Guardian Consent Form
Circle Time Check-ins in Secondary Schools:
A Classroom Approach to Improving Students’ Social Responsibility

“To what degree, if any, will the use of weekly Circle Time Check-ins in a Grade 8 classroom lead to the improvement of social responsibility levels, as reported by students?”

September 2017

Carmen Zimmer
Graduate Student
Masters of Educational Leadership
Vancouver Island University
czimmer@sd79.bc.ca

Harry Janzen
Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
Harry.Janzen@viu.ca

This research study will investigate the effect of an instructional method, Circle Time Check-ins, on the social responsibility levels of Grade 8 students. The research study will involve your child’s advisor class and will be conducted between September and November 2017. This research study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Master’s in Educational Leadership Degree and the results will be presented in a thesis that may be published online in VIU’s library.

All students in the advisor class will be introduced to Circle Time Check-ins during their one-hour advisor block at the beginning of each week. As part of normal teaching activities, all students will complete a survey during the first week of September and again in November, to self-assess their levels of social responsibility before and after the unit.

To participate in this study you are being asked to provide consent for your child’s survey results to be used as research data. Student names and identities will not be used in any part of the thesis. I will administer and collect all student surveys, then pass them along to my research assistant who will create an anonymized data set, which will only include the scores from participating students who have given their assent and received parent/guardian consent. At no time will the participants be made public and at no time will I be aware of who is participating in the study.

I am hoping that most students (18 or more) will choose to participate by allowing me to use their survey scores in my research. However, there is no direct benefit to your child for choosing to participate in my research study. There will also be no penalty if your child chooses not to participate in my research study. Anonymity of students will be maintained, as all students will be asked to complete the surveys during class, so no student will be identifiable as a participant to their peers or to their teacher or me.

Your child’s participation in this research study is completely voluntary and he/she can withdraw at any time by contacting the FKSS school office or my research assistant, Michelle Webb.
If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s treatment as a participant in this research study, please contact the Vancouver Island University Ethics Officer by phone at (250)740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me by phone at (250)743-6916, ext. 305 or by email at czimmer@sd79.bc.ca.

Thank you,

Mrs. Carmen Zimmer
Frances Kelsey Secondary School
(250)743-6916, ext. 295
mwebb@sd79.bc.ca
To provide consent for your child to participate in this study, please circle ‘YES’ when you respond to the statement below, complete the form, and return it to the FKSS front office.

If you do NOT wish your child to participate, please circle ‘NO’ when you respond to the statement below, complete the form, and return it to the FKSS front office.

__________________________
Name of Student (please print)

I have read the above Consent Form. I understand the nature of this research and the nature of my child’s participation in this research study. I understand my child’s participation in this research study is completely voluntary. I understand that my child may choose to withdraw from this study at any time, even though I have granted consent.

I consent to allow my child to participate in this research study. YES NO

__________________________  _______________________
Signature of Legal Guardian  Date
CIRCLE TIME CHECK-INS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Student Assent Form

Circle Time Check-ins in Secondary Schools:
A Classroom Approach to Improving Students’ Social Responsibility

“To what degree, if any, will the use of weekly Circle Time Check-ins in a Grade 8 classroom lead to the improvement of social responsibility levels, as reported by students?”

September 2017

Carmen Zimmer
Graduate Student
Masters of Educational Leadership
Vancouver Island University
czimmer@sd79.bc.ca

Harry Janzen
Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
Harry.Janzen@viu.ca

This research study will investigate the effect of an instructional method, Circle Time Check-ins, on the social responsibility levels of Grade 8 students. This study will be conducted between September and November 2017. Your advisor class has been chosen to participate in my research. I am doing this study as part of the requirements of my Master’s in Educational Leadership and the results will be presented in a thesis that may be published online in VIU’s library.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Grade 8 student at Frances Kelsey where I am a teacher. As a student in this advisor class, you will complete a survey to self-assess your levels of social responsibility before and after an 8-week unit. All students in your advisor class will be introduced to Circle Time Check-ins during the one-hour advisor block at the beginning of each week.

As a student in this class you will participate in all of the learning activities, but to participate in the study you are being asked to provide permission to me, the researcher, to use your survey scores as research data. Your participation in the study and your results will be anonymous to me. If you and your parent/guardian give me consent, then only your scores will be provided to me for use in writing my Thesis. Your name will not be made public or be used in any part of my research and I will not be told at any time whether you choose to participate or not. I will administer and collect all student surveys, then pass them along to my research assistant who will create an anonymous data set, which will only include the scores from participating students who have given their assent and received parent/guardian consent.

I am hoping that most students (18 or more) will choose to participate by allowing me to use their survey scores in my research. However, your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. There is no direct benefit for choosing to participate in my research study, and there will also be no penalty if you choose not to participate in my research study. You can also withdraw from the study at any time by contacting my research assistant, Michelle Webb, and she will withdraw your scores from the anonymous data list. If you choose to participate in...
this study, you will not be identifiable to me, or your classmates, or your teacher as surveys will be administered to and collected from every student in this class.

If you or your parent/guardians have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research study, please contact the Vancouver Island University Ethics Officer at (250) 802-0789, or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you or your parent/guardians have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me by phone at (250)743-6916, ext. 305 or by email at czimmer@sd79.bc.ca.

Thank you,

Mrs. Carmen Zimmer     Ms. Michelle Webb (Research Assistant)
Frances Kelsey Secondary School (250)743-6916, ext. 295
                                     mwebb@sd79.bc.ca
To participate in this study, please circle ‘YES’ when you respond to the statement below, sign the form, and return it to the FKSS front office.

If you do NOT wish to participate, please circle ‘NO’ when you respond to the statement below, sign the form, and return it to the FKSS front office.

______________________________________________
Name of Student (please print)

I have read the above Assent Form. I understand what will happen during this research study and I understand that only my scores will be used. I understand that my participation in this research study is completely voluntary. I understand that I can choose to withdraw from this study at any time, even though I have granted assent.

I agree to participate in this research study.  YES  NO
______________________________________________  _______________________________________
Signature of Student                     Date
Appendix C

Social Responsibility Survey

This survey deals with differences among people, respect for self and others, personal responsibility, and understanding how an individual’s actions affect other people. Your responses will remain anonymous and will be used to determine your current social responsibility level. It is important that your responses reflect your own personal beliefs.

PLEASE remember to answer as HONESTLY and SERIOUSLY as possible.

Part A: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. Place a checkmark in the location that best reflects your opinion.

1. Problems between people are best handled by working together to find a solution.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

2. I think about how my decisions will affect other people.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

3. Students need to accept responsibility for their actions.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

4. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person’s point of view.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

5. I base my decisions on what I think is fair and unfair.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

6. No matter how angry someone makes me, I am still responsible for my actions.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

7. People should be judged for what they do, not where they are from.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree

8. Teenagers should find ways to help others in the community.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Strongly Agree
Part B: The following scenarios ask you to consider how you would act in a given situation. Please select the answer that comes closest to what you would do in each situation.

9. You are part of a group working on a project, and no one else is doing any work. What would you most likely do?
   A. Stop working as well.
   B. Do some of the work, but not really care about it.
   C. Do your share of the work.
   D. Talk to the group about getting to work.
   E. Talk to your teacher.
   F. Other: ____________________________________________

10. You find a $20 bill in the back of the classroom. What would you most likely do?
    A. Keep it.
    B. Turn it in to the teacher.
    C. Other: ____________________________________________

11. You are talking to your friends and one of them refers to people from a different culture by a racist name. What would you most likely do?
    A. Nothing – it doesn’t bother you.
    B. Nothing – although you think it is wrong to say things like that.
    C. Tell your friend that you think it is wrong to say things like that.
    D. Other: ____________________________________________

12. You are walking down the hallway and you hear a student saying mean, unfair things to another student. What would you most likely do?
    A. Find an adult.
    B. Not get involved.
    C. Feel kind of sorry for the other person.
    D. Tell the student to stop saying things like that.
    E. Other: ____________________________________________
Part C: Place a checkmark in the location that indicates how often you do the following activities.

When you have the opportunity, how often do you...

13. Try to be nice to other students when they are sad about something?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

14. Try to be quiet when other students are studying?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

15. Help other teenagers when they have a problem?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

16. Think about how your behaviour in school will affect other students?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

17. Take the time to listen to other people’s arguments, even when you think they are wrong?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

18. Talk to your friends about how you can stop racism?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

19. Speak out when other students use negative language to talk about people from other cultures?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

20. Help neighbours or relatives when a job needs to be done?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable

21. Participate as a volunteer in a school or community organization or event?
   - No
   - All of the Time
   - Not Applicable