What happens when adults and children converse?

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- Background

- Talking Circles Framework

- The Stories

Presentation Overview
Using action research we examined two integrated components. We examined the undergraduate students’ responses to engaging in conversations with children as they facilitated the talking circles. Simultaneously we examined the children’s engagement and response to the talking circle process.

**Background**
Talking Circles Framework
The Talking Circles are designed to encourage children to ask questions about their social purpose. Through a guided conversational process children will learn to look within themselves to see their inherent capabilities and current reality, hear from others so that barriers between self and others dissolve and new perspectives are understood, and make connections enabling them to make positive change for themselves and their community.
Framework

Scharmer, O. (2009)
The foundational capacity of the U is LISTENING

• Listening to others

• Listening to oneself and;

• Listening to what emerges from the collective

Framework
The program has been designed using social constructivist, ecological and socio-cultural perspectives with its practical application embedded in the understanding of emergent curriculum, popular education and experiential learning, where the facilitator is seen as a learner as well as a teacher (Bishop and Fay 2004) and knowledge is created from the child’s reflection on their own experience, deepened by discovering others’ knowledge through talking and listening.

Framework
• This program has its base in the ideas of Paulo Friere and Foucault who see oppression and poverty as a result of the power differentials that exist in society. In a sense this program has a political agenda - a ‘grass roots’ approach to social action.

• The talking circle represents an affirmation of the rights of the child. Through this process it is envisioned that reciprocity of respect with the child will be established.
• brings knowledge of the process and the framework

• assists in building the relationships

• compliments the phases of the process with social and emotional skill development

• acts as a coach and mentor as the group creates its own energy and momentum
- Art
- Stories
- Drama
- Video-taping
- Audio-recording
- Mind mapping
- Interviews
- Conversations
- Photographs

Tools
This process built leadership capacity of both the children and undergraduate students (unintended outcome). The students and the children became more self-aware, gained confidence in their capacity to problem-solve and take risks and subsequently built resilience.

What happened as a result of what we did?
The university students indicated change for them included:

- Ability to self reflect
- Skills to communicate with children
- Ability to have open and questioning relationships with children
- Let go of habitual ways of ‘managing’ a group of children
- Confidence in problem-solving with children.

**Findings**
• Children’s wellbeing was enhanced. Children who were shy began talking. Children felt less stressed.

• I was surprised that I could build such a close relationship with a child. In my country this would not be possible. I will take this with me to use these communication skills with my own children as well as with those I will be working with.

• I think I can understand them more now and probably respect them in a different way, for the knowledge they have and how they can share that.
• I was amazed at how quickly I could build a relationship with the children.

• The development of empathy towards each other was a dynamic that I was not expecting, some children shared quite deeply about issues within their own family life and this created a space for true friendship to blossom.

The Student’s Stories
• It’s calm, its peaceful and I feel less stressed. Chani, age 11.
• We can talk about things that we can’t at the oval. We talk about ourselves. Mitch, age 9.
• People like me here. I have made more friends. I can trust people here. Tiani, age 9.
• I don’t get into trouble anymore at school. We can get tips when we are having hard times. We get to share our life. Zac, age 10.
• It’s a place to get away from noise and others. We can talk about our problems and we can share our feelings and share about our families. Manni, age 8.

The Children’s Stories
• “It’s quite fun, normally when we're at Talking Circles, it’s like a big something, I don’t know what something is, but I know I’m quite a nice person and whenever I’m with Shona (university student) doing Talking Circles it’s quite a good day and umm and its quite nice being me, it’s like I’m someone else”. (Tara age 8)
• It would appear, from this study, that the opportunity to use experiential learning and critical reflection with university students as a means of developing self-awareness and communications skills is important.

• This in turn enhanced the students’ abilities to build meaningful relationships with children and develop their capacity to build resilience and leadership skills.

Conclusion
• Without in-depth data that looks at how children and adults are together in conversation, it is difficult to plan and develop appropriate interventions and policies in our efforts to build equitable and trusting relationships between children and adults.

• The stories the students and the children told inspired me to inquiry into the ‘lived experiences’ between adults and children in a number of contexts to inquire into what happens when children and adults converse?

Conclusion