

## Dr. Gaye Lang Interview 3-1-23

Dr. Lang: [Circle] is a very intentional process and it's very calming when you do it well and it's very effective when you do it well. So those are my two things that I really push in my training to do it well, to do it intentionally, and to do it with fidelity.

What happens a lot of times, people try to say, "Well, it [R] does not work." And I've had people say, "I tried that once." Yeah, if you want to try something once, that's right - it's never going to work one time. Nothing works one time. You have to do something and be consistent, stick with it. And then you'll see your real fruits on the other end.

I always give [trainees] the 30-day challenge. I say, do 30 days consecutively using a talking piece and do a one minute get-to-know-you relationship-building question with your students—just one minute out of your class period a day. I will bet money that you will know something about your students you never knew before. And you're not asking them personal questions. They're simple. What's your favorite food? Do you have a dog? Do you have a cat? If you had \$100, what would you do with it today? Simple, simple things that you get to know a little bit about your students, and guess what? They get to know stuff about themselves, each other. They're peers. They now can have another conversation.

You always have to start building a relationship. [If] you're afraid to do a Circle, there's always another route. And I think that that is my biggest purpose, to make sure those relationships begin to establish themselves in schools, classrooms, with adults, or whoever, so that we can change the trajectory of discipline in this country.

When I began this process, I used Kay Pranis [and Carolyn Boyes-Watson's] book *Circle Forward* a lot to get ideas on how to do different kinds of Circles. We started in public schools with community building Circles. We're not trying to repair the harm. We're not doing re-entry. I start them out with just getting to know students. *Circle Forward* has one lesson plan called "Celebration Circle." There's one called "Friendship Circle." And these are the ones I tell people to try out first. I tell them the book is optional to buy, but it would be a good investment from a personal standpoint to have in your own repertoire of resources, because they have almost every Circle imaginable in there.

Once you get past the community building Circles, you might really want to learn about repairing the harm, conflict Circles. There are chapters in *Circle Forward* for that too, but you have to first understand what community building Circles look like, feel like, sound like. Then when you get to this repairing the harm process, you understand the importance of the talking piece. You understand the importance of the values used in the Circle, so when you get to a Tier Two Circle, which is repairing the harm or healing, you understand those parts. In *Circle Forward* they give you specific things you can do to establish one of those kinds of Circles.

I use it [*Circle Forward*] for everything. My book is pretty torn up to be honest with you. And yes, I have two nice ones. Never been used before, well-kept. I can't use those because I don't have

notes in them. The one that's torn up is dog-eared and the binding is broken a little bit—I've repaired it a couple of times, but I know where everything is in there. If I go change [books], I'd have put all those notes in the brand-new book, and I'm pretty sure the brand-new book will end up looking just like [the old one]. When people ask me about something, I get my *Circle Forward* book and I say, "What was your topic?" Then I find that topic in the book and tell them, "Open this page," and we step through that Circle. I say, "Is there anything here that you find useful?" And that's how I teach them how to use the book properly.

Once trainees know which Circle they want to do, then we customize it to their need. Kay and Carolyn give you a framework of questions, a framework of how you can lay it out. If none of those work for you, you can customize the Circle using the framework in *Circle Forward*. Why would you go and reinvent the wheel when it's already there?

In fact, I did [a Circle] with a gentleman who, many, many years ago, had a real tough Circle. He was trying to figure it out. He had had my training, but, you know, everybody who has been trained, when you get your first real situation, it's like, "uh, where are my notes?" He called me, and his situation was he [was working with] a young man who was trying to get out of a gang, and it was just really tough. We used a *Circle Forward* lesson plan—one similar to a reentry Circle.

This gentleman met with the young man, a pastor, a community leader, the student's parent, and his probation officer. And they had the Circle. I stepped them through the process using one of the models from *Circle Forward*. I said, "Now, before you do the Circle, practice this again by yourself or with someone else, just read it through. Don't get off the script because if you do, and then go down another path that you can't come back from, it's gonna be difficult. These are some specific questions These are some specific activities you can do to bring closure to the situation Please stick with it—that way you'll be safe." They did it. He called me the next morning and said, "Doctor Lang, it works!" I said "I know it does!"