

# Making Morning Circle Meaningful

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## Abstract

Morning Circle, also known as Morning Meeting, is often a daily lesson in both general education and special education classrooms. The primary purpose of the Circle is to support each child to establish membership in the class while developing a classroom community and culture. The Responsive Classroom Approach recommends four Circle components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and news and announcements (Kriete, 2002). Strategies such as embedding the instruction of IEP objectives, differentiating instruction, encouraging the active physical involvement of students, and creating opportunities for communication support the participation of children with disabilities. This article shares Circle components, routines, and strategies as demonstrated by ten special educators serving children with severe disabilities, ages 3- 10 years. Video clips are used to illustrate key concepts.

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## Keywords

morning circle, communication, severe disabilities, deaf-blind

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## **Making Morning Circle Meaningful for Students with Severe Disabilities**

During a recent research study on communication and early language development, the first author was fortunate to collect video documentation of twenty-seven Morning Circle and Morning Meeting lessons across ten special education classrooms. These classrooms included children ages 3-10 years with severe developmental delays and autism, physical disabilities, or congenital deafblindness. The observations and videos provided an opportunity to learn about effective Circle routines from experienced special education teachers. This paper frames Morning Circle within the Responsive Classroom Approach and then discusses the specific components and instructional strategies used by the observed teachers.

### **Morning Circle in the Responsive Classroom Approach**

*Morning Circle*, also known as *Morning Meeting*, is a typical component of the school day in both general education and special education classrooms across the U.S. and beyond (Kriete, 2003). Children gather to participate in this daily routine that provides opportunities to learn socialization skills, communication skills, and academics while establishing a sense of classroom community.

The primary purpose of Morning Circle is for each child to develop a sense of emotional safety in the context of establishing the classroom community (Bechtel, 2004; Winterman & Sapona, 2002). The predictability of the ritualized Circle components, coupled with individual opportunities for successful participation, support children to develop a sense of security in the classroom (Winterman & Sapona, 2002). Feelings of safety make it easier for each child to learn and to take risks (Bondy & Ketts, 2001; Nash, 2003). The shared knowledge that emerges

from these well-rehearsed routines becomes part of the individual classroom culture.

While Morning Circle has long been part of the daily classroom schedule, most recently it has received attention as an important element of the *Responsive Classroom Approach* (Kriete, 2002). “One tenet of the *Responsive Classroom* is that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum” (Winterman & Sapona, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, the goals of Morning Circle extend beyond an academic emphasis. Circle provides distinct benefits to children with disabilities and bilingual children included in the general education classroom because it encourages multiple levels of participation and a sense of belonging (Winterman & Sapona). Teachers of students with special needs embed instruction on individual student I.E.P. objectives within the Circle components. The four components of Morning Circle as espoused by the *Responsive Classroom Approach* are *greeting*, *sharing*, *group activity*, and *news and announcements* (Kriete, 2002; Bechtel, 2004).

Feelings of individual importance are enhanced as each child hears his/her own name during the *greeting* component of Morning Circle. This also provides an opportunity for children to learn each other's names, thus supporting classroom membership (Bondy & Ketts, 2001). This is beneficial due to the increasing number of children who attend multiple schools during their educational careers and even in a single year. A variety of greetings are possible such as verbal greetings, high fives, and handshakes. Verbal greetings can be varied by pairing the greeting with a ball toss or specified movement, by passing an object, or by greeting in different languages (Bechtel, 2004). Practicing appropriate greetings includes establishing eye contact and appropriate body position and body space.

The *sharing* component addresses communication skills while children learn

more about each other. Children must listen while a peer communicates and then they are expected to ask questions of the child. For example, children might share about their pets, their favorite leisure activity, or about how they spent a holiday vacation. Sharing provides a context in which to teach about good listening. It also provides an opportunity to put thinking into words as children share their own experiences and pose questions to their peers.

A short *group activity* ensures that each child has a way to participate (Bechtel, 2004). A daily song, physical activity, poem, chant, dance, or game becomes an important part of classroom ritual and identity (Bondy & Ketts, 2001).

The final component is *news and announcements*. Kriete (2002) suggests highlighting one or two events of the day rather than reviewing the entire schedule. Teachers or paraprofessionals serving students with severe disabilities might prefer to preview the daily schedule as part of teaching the daily routine; however if each child has a unique schedule, it would be better to highlight one or two whole class activities. The purpose of this segment is to get students enthused about the day (Bechtel, 2004). The Circle ends by providing a transition to the next activity/lesson of the day.

Across these four components, students build their socialization, communication, and academic skills. Each child should leave Circle feeling important, driven by the adult and peer recognition received (Kriete, 2003). The importance of each classroom member is emphasized because each member actively participates. Therefore, each child's abilities, including language abilities and comfort within group situations, must be considered. Circle provides opportunities to encourage children to have positive relationships (Farrell, 2003). Children learn to take turns, wait, and to cooperate during group games. The positive socialization effects

gained in Morning Circle may influence other parts of the day, such as participation in other group lessons (Farrell, 2003).

Children practice communication skills during each of the components of Morning Circle by sharing experiences, posing questions to peers, and listening (Kriete, 2002). The linguistic diversity of a class can be integrated into the Morning Circle experience as children greet in different languages. Some may use voice output devices or sign language during sharing time. Others may use photos or line drawings. When including children with severe disabilities, it is important to select some teacher phrases and questions that are part of every Morning Circle routine so that children can recognize communication cues. For example, the teacher could regularly include questions such as: Who's next? and Who wants a turn?

Morning Circle provides a rich context for offering learning experiences that address multiple intelligences (Nash, 2003). Incorporating music, movement, and time to share personal interests creates opportunities for children to showcase their individual strengths as learners.

Some teachers incorporate thematic instruction within the Morning Circle routine. For some, this might mean focusing on a particular domain of learning such as a Math related activity on Mondays. For others, the emphasis could be on a theme, such as animals, with activities across learning domains focused on the study of animals. The following website is a source for more information on the *Responsive Classroom Approach*: [www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org).

## **Planning the Morning Circle Routine**

Meaningful Morning Circles start with careful planning, including decision making about the components, physical environment, equipment, staffing, artifacts, positive behav-

iors supports, and communication with parents (Bechtel, 2004).

### *The Components*

A good starting point is to decide on the components of the Morning Circle because this will affect other decisions. The Responsive Classroom structure described above can be adapted to both general education and special education classrooms. While the components of Morning Circle varied in the observed classrooms, the following activities were included in one or more classrooms: attendance, greeting, music and chants, calendar, daily schedule (including special class events), weather or season, cognitive lessons, games, and exercise or gross motor imitation.

The teacher must decide if the students would benefit from learning an abbreviated Morning Circle routine first, one that might include only one or two components of what will become the full Morning Circle. Bechtel (2004) suggests that this is an effective approach and that it is often best to start with greetings and news/announcements (which in some classrooms could be a discussion of the daily schedule).

### *Physical Environment*

A special place should be established within the classroom for the Morning Circle sessions. If children must sit on the floor, then carpet is a good idea. Some teachers like to have the carpet in the shape of a circle. Seating is usually organized in a semi-circle or horseshoe shaped arrangement. Space near a wall is necessary if the class is working on calendar, attendance, or any other components that will require posting materials on a flat, sturdy surface.

### *Equipment and materials*

Equipment decisions focus on adaptive seating and communication devices. Several of the observed teachers used heavy plastic chairs (that could be stacked in a corner

later) with each child seated in a different color chair so that children could locate their own seats and to allow opportunities to practice color recognition. When children identify their location with a color rather than a position, it allows the teacher to change the seating arrangements to allow for different social opportunities. The seating must be selected and positioned so that children and adults are at eye level to facilitate conversations. A combination of equipment, such as supine standers and wheelchairs can work if children are at eye level to each other. Some children may require positional changes during the Circle routine to ensure their physical comfort and continual engagement.

Communication equipment, such as switches and other voice output devices and mounts, is another area of consideration. The physical therapist, occupational therapist, and speech therapist can be helpful in planning for communication supports. Some teachers use a small portable easel so that photos and line drawings can be placed on a slanted vertical plane to support the visual needs of children in the classroom. The slant board provides a stable platform that keeps the photos from moving, making the task more accessible to children with visual impairment. *Photo #1: Slant Board* shows a platform that Jill, the classroom teacher, uses when presenting visual choices to her students with vision loss.

### *Communication Supports*

A meaningful representation for Circle will need to be chosen for each child. The representation may be a photograph, line drawing, object, print, or braille. The teacher may decide to use additional representations for the various components of Morning Circle, such as calendar, music, and sharing. One common communication challenge is determining how to integrate the use of single message switches during Circle. If students are using single messages voice output devices, it might be better to record one

**Photo #1: Slant Board**



versatile message than to record multiple messages for each child during Circle routines, which can create excessive down time. Karen uses messages such as “I want a turn” or “I want something.” These messages may then be used to draw teacher attention and to make requests for a turn during Circle. Some children repeatedly activate the same message creating distractions. Most of the observed teachers address the challenge of repetitive switch activation by leaving the switch on the seat or wheelchair tray, but they move it slightly to the side or forward from the child, still keeping it within the child’s reach. They pair this action with a verbal explanation and reminder that other children are taking their turns. In this way, the child’s switch is not removed or turned off, but the social expectation to take turns is communicated by the teacher. Still, the teacher must exercise caution in not inadvertently reinforcing inappropriate use of switches by providing attention to children who are interrupting the turns of others.

#### *Staff Participation*

Staffing is important to successful Morning Circle sessions. There should be a sufficient number of staff or peer helpers to ensure that each child’s communicative attempts are recognized and that each child can actively participate (including the performance of any motor components). Some children may require behavioral/social supports, so the teacher must develop the positive behavioral supports to ensure each child’s participation and to communicate those strategies to the appropriate paraprofessionals. Teachers are responsible to inform the paraprofessionals of what each child should be learning in Circle, including the appropriate level of support and vocabulary of emphasis. Jill uses a curriculum map on which she records the order of Circle activities in the center of the map. Around that center are squares, each labeled with a student’s initials, in which she records the objectives and key vocabulary for each child to work on during Circle. Paraprofessionals also may share responsibility to

collect data on individual student objectives during Morning Circle. Using a flip chart to record the words of Circle songs and poems can support staff to participate more fully in Circle. This is particularly important in settings where paraprofessionals are shared across classrooms and also is helpful to the participation of substitute teachers and floating paraprofessionals.

### *Behavioral Supports*

Bechtel (2004) suggests that teachers consider how to reinforce positive behaviors and how to correct inappropriate behaviors during Circle. Specific reinforcement phrases should be taught to all the adults. Examples might be: “I really like the way you’re sitting,” “Good eye contact,” “Thanks for raising your hand” and “Thank you for looking when your name is called.” The teacher will need to establish procedures to redirect inappropriate student behavior. In some cases, tokens or tangible reinforcement will need to be distributed during Morning Circle time. These can then be traded later at the child’s individual rate of exchange (e.g. five stickers equals time with the headphones.) In one classroom, some of the children with autism cannot sit for the entire Circle routine. They are provided with “take five” symbols and they quietly use the symbols as they exit and reenter the Circle area. Photos or line drawings that prompt appropriate behavior may also be integrated into Circle and paired with verbal praise when the child corrects behavior following the presentation of the reminder symbol.

### *Circle Artifacts*

Teachers will want to select specific artifacts or props that students will come to associate with various aspects of Morning Circle. A specially designed container is one type of artifact that can be successfully integrated into the Circle routine. Several of the teachers use baskets and different types of

bags. Children understand that something exciting is going to happen when they see, hear, or touch the basket. It immediately draws their attention while creating a sense of anticipation. The basket and bags function as a symbol for the group activity that provides for each child’s individualized participation. The containers may hold items for each child to explore, one object per child. Integrating the daily use of this artifact allows the teacher to embed lessons on concepts, such as working on “out” as the children remove something from the basket and working on “in” when children replace the objects to the basket as part of clean-up. Visual and tactual searching, turn taking, positional concepts (moving the basket to the right, or in front of the child), and sequential concepts (first, next, last) can also be incorporated into making full use of the basket. These concepts may be addressed daily while additional concepts and vocabulary associated with the items placed in the basket may be introduced in accordance with the theme for the lesson. Feldman (1995) presents ideas for additional artifacts appropriate for Morning Circle such as microphones to be used when verbal students take turns speaking and creative ways for ambulatory kids to transition to Circle, such as by forming a class train.

### *Parent Involvement*

Teachers may want to consider sending a letter to parents to describe the goals of Morning Circle (Working with Families, Responsive Classroom Newsletter, 2001). Such a letter could communicate to parents what they can do to support the participation of their child. For example, parents could record a message about an event that occurred in the home on a single message communication device. Later, the child could activate the message during the sharing component of Morning Circle. Porter (2003) suggests holding an actual adult Circle for parents’ night. She cites the importance of the family know-

ing about Circle because it is often a favorite part of the child's day.

### **Instructional Ideas from Classrooms Serving Children with Severe and Multiple Disabilities**

This section discusses the instructional content and materials the observed teachers use to support successful Circle routines. Transitions, attendance, greeting, daily schedule and/or calendar, weather, gross motor activities, thematic instruction, cognitive components, and music and chants will be discussed. Many of these instructional ideas may also be used in inclusive settings that include children with severe disabilities.

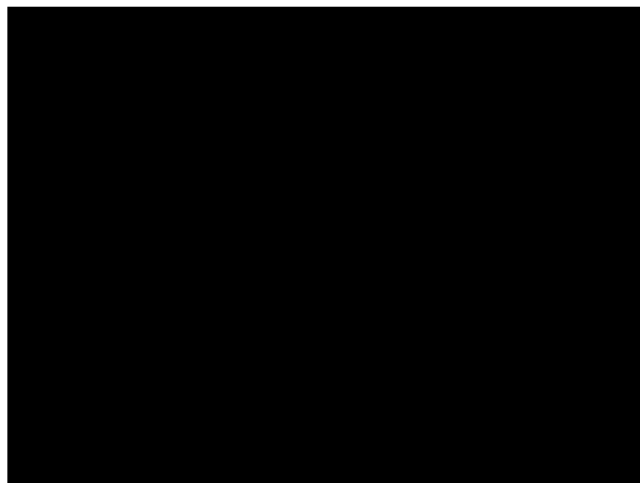
#### *Transitioning to and from Morning Circle*

A symbol to represent Morning Circle will need to be chosen for each child. If the

child is learning signs, the sign for "sit" can be moved in the motion of a circle when it is time to transition to Circle. In Anita and Kim's preschool classrooms, each child has a large circular cushion of a different color. A laminated photo of each child is attached to the top of the cushion. Each child locates the symbol in his/her individual schedule box. The children carry their symbols from their schedule boxes to the Circle area. The Circle symbols can then be placed on the seat of the matching color chair. Whatever representation is used, the child should be supported to have receptive and expressive opportunities to use the symbol. *Video clip #1: Transition to Circle and Greeting Song* shows one young child who is deafblind selecting and carrying her symbol as she transitions to Morning Circle. The video continues through the opening song.

#### **Video clip #1: Transition to Circle and Greeting Song**

(If clicking on this video fails to launch video, download video separately from this site.)



One student teacher uses a song to transition to the Morning Circle area. This gives the children something to listen to while adults are positioning them in their wheelchairs and adjusting the switch mounts. Jill

uses a stuffed and colorful rope circle to set the tone for Morning Circle. Each child holds onto the stuffed rope during the opening greeting song. This tactile artifact is particularly helpful to including a child with visual



impairment and a moderate hearing loss. See *Photo #2: Circle Rope*. Jessica uses a bus to symbolize Morning Circle for her students with vision. Each child touches the bus as the teacher verbalizes that it is time for Morning

Circle. The association between being at school and the bus continues as the class sings a song about the bus.

### **Photo #2: Circle Rope**



If there are several adults present during Morning Circle, the adult assuming Circle Leader role may want to wear a special symbol to support visual recognition of the adult in the teaching role, though it will be necessary to establish a different cue for children who are blind. A brightly colored apron can support children to track the leader as he/she moves about the Circle to support the participation of individual children (Illustrated in Video clip #1.)

Morning Circle ends with an exit routine that may even include an exit song. Children may learn to leave the Circle when they hear their names called as part of the exit greeting. For example, in Anita's and Kim's preschool rooms they say, "Bye bye [child's name]." Jessica's class ends their Morning Circle by singing the following words as the

last verse of their Circle song, "The teachers on the bus say Circle is finished." Students learn to recognize these familiar words as a cue that it is time to transition to the next lesson. They are also supported to understand the transition by once again looking at and touching the bus (Circle symbol) as adults inform each child that Circle is finished. The symbol for Circle can then be placed in the finished box of each child's individual schedule.

### *Attendance*

Attendance is a typical component of Morning Circle. Jill's students place their photos on the bus as part of her attendance routine (See *Photo #3: Attendance Bus*.) Jessica supports students to place their photo on the schoolhouse (See *Photo #4: Attendance*

*Schoolhouse*). Karen uses a large rectangular nametag for each child in her class. On the left is the child's first name and on the right side is a photo of the child. Each student is learning to recognize his/her own photograph. If a child isn't yet ready to select his/her own photo from a choice of two, the teacher may want to start with just the child's photograph or a choice between the child's photograph

and a blank sheet of paper or a large line drawing of a face to support self-identification. Attendance is a particularly appropriate time to embed gross and fine motor skills. Walking and wheelchair mobility can be rehearsed as the child approaches the attendance board. Reach and grasp can be emphasized as the child selects his/her own photograph and hands it to the teacher.

**Photo #3: Attendance Bus**



**Photo #4: Attendance Schoolhouse**



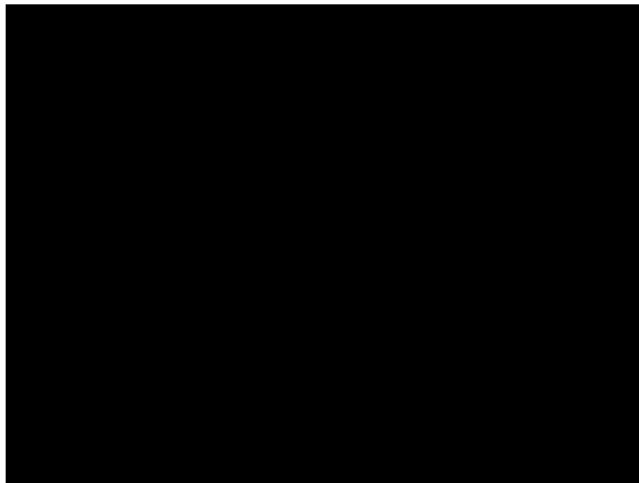
### *Greeting*

Greetings can be accomplished through a wave, handshake, verbalization, or high five. The *Doing Morning Meeting: The Essential Components* (2004) video has suggestions for greetings. In Jessica's room, students select the photograph of a peer to greet, from an array of two. As the class sings the song to a focus child, an enlarged photograph of that child is taken around the Circle for each student to view. In Jill's room, each child is greeted in song and the students select either their own photo or the photo of a friend until all of the children have been the recipient of a personalized greeting. *Video clip #2: Selecting Self Photo* shows one child making his choice and then signing "bus" when his

teacher creates a pause within this familiar routine. The speech pathologists in Jill and Jessica's school take responsibility to provide appropriate picture symbols to support Circle. In Tom's room, adults gesture on the child's chest as they say and sign the child's name to support the child to develop an association between symbols and self as part of self-identification. Ann provides considerable time for each of her students with autism to stand before each peer and greet appropriately. They greet using the peer's name while rehearsing appropriate body space, clear and audible verbalizations, friendly touch (in high fives and handshakes), and eye contact.

### **Video clip #2: Selecting Self Photo**

(If clicking on this video fails to launch video, download video separately from this site.)



### *Daily Schedule, Calendar, and Weather*

Some of the classrooms concentrate on identifying the day of the week and the daily activities, while others address the month, year, and date. Karen attaches velcro to the dates to create a more interactive lesson for students who place the numbers in the correct location on the calendar. In the process of pulling information off and placing information on the calendar, these preschoolers are practicing fine motor skills. Lisa uses a

monthly calendar and her students count from the beginning of the month to the date for the previous day. She then asks, "What comes next?" A student will then respond with the appropriate number for today's date and place that number on the calendar. When the date does not hold special meaning for the students, it can be more beneficial to spend time identifying the day of the week and some activity that occurs on that day. Feldman (1995) suggests using three large envelopes on which

appear labels for “yesterday,” “today,” and “tomorrow.” The day of week can be printed on index cards and then placed in each envelope after appropriate identification. During Circle, the teacher may include conversation about events from yesterday and events that will occur today and tomorrow. Ann chooses to conclude her Morning Meeting with the day’s schedule because her students with autism need this review before they can transition to the next activity. She carefully previews the next activity of the day by rehearsing each step. For example, she describes the steps of going to the library in the following way: “We will listen to a book, take a break, choose a book, check out the book, come back for \_\_\_\_,” thus creating a pause for children to recall the next event.

Some of the observed teachers include instruction on daily weather and even temperature, while others prefer to focus on season. Daily weather can be difficult to comprehend in climates where the temperature varies greatly during a single day. Concepts such as cloudy, sunny, cold and hot are relative, accounting for some of the errors students make. Jessica focuses on a seasonal theme rather than daily weather. This provides for longer rehearsal of the seasonal characteristics and symbols.

#### *Gross Motor/Exercise*

Lisa’s Morning Circle features a yoga component. Her students take turns selecting a yoga position and then all of the staff and students imitate the position depicted in the drawing. This is an interesting way to integrate imitation and awareness of body positioning while providing an opportunity for the students to move about and stretch before returning to deskwork.

#### *Thematic Instruction, Concept Development, and Memory*

Themes may be introduced by using a special container, as previously described, in

which objects related to the theme are placed. Each child can reach into the container and pull out an item. The items can be related in some way, creating a functional way to teach categories within Circle. For example, Kim and Anita, co-teachers, place different types of balls (big, little, smooth, and bumpy) in their Circle basket during the ball theme unit. They also do a theme on apples, featuring discussion about color and size. The *Doing Morning Meeting: The Essential Components* (2004) video suggests doing a theme on favorite things as one way for children to get to know each other.

Liz incorporates holiday and seasonal themes into her Circle routines. For example, children pull an ornament out of the Circle basket and then place it on the holiday tree. The ornaments were selected based on individual student preferences. *Video clip #3: Introducing the Basket* shows a segment of this lesson while also demonstrating how Liz introduces the basket each day. Liz also uses a Pot of Gold poster display (for St. Patrick’s day) and provides each child with a coin on which a number is printed (1, 2, or 3). They match the number on the coin to the number on the poster and place it accordingly and then sign the numbers. During the winter, Liz uses a snowman to teach about facial parts. She uses a large styrofoam ball to represent the snowman’s head. She places the facial parts in the basket, along with the styrofoam ball and enough top hats for each child to have one (because putting the top hat on your own head is part of the fun). Children then take turns placing the snowman’s eyes, nose, mouth, and hat while signing the body parts. In the spring, she includes themes around butterflies and bees with songs and chants that correspond. Children place bees on hives and butterflies on or near flowers while learning concepts such as in, on, next to, right, left, under, and over.

### Video clip #3: Introducing the Basket

(If clicking on this video fails to launch video, download video separately from this site.)



Thematic instruction provides a context in which concepts can be revisited, thus supporting memory. Some concepts, such as more, next, and last can be practiced everyday during Circle. Kim and Anita include counting as a daily feature of their Circle lessons. *Video clip #4: Embedding Number Concepts* shows several young children who are deafblind counting the objects that they selected from the Circle basket. Note that the child who is blind is assisted to touch the apples while counting. Anita and Kim regularly refer to theme activities from previous days to support the development of memory. Activities in which a physical action is performed and associated with a strong emotional response are most likely to be remembered (Vege, 2004). For example, during the ball unit, Kim asks her preschoolers, “Remember what bumpy ball did on Friday? (pause). It bu, bu, bu, bumped kids on the tummy,” eliciting a pleasurable memory connected to this physical activity. Music and chants can also be used to embed concepts within Circle routines.

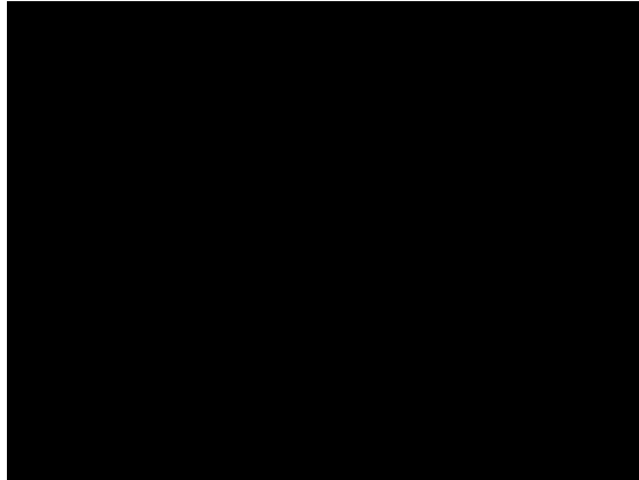
#### *Music and Chants*

The teachers in this study use songs and chants across the various components of Morning Circle. All of the teachers use at least one greeting song to open Circle and some allow students to select the greeting song. Jill closes her Circle with a song about friendship. In Jessica’s room, calendar concepts are reinforced by singing the days of the week song to the tune of the theme song from the old T.V. show, *The Addams Family*.

The teachers report using websites, audio recordings, and music books as sources of their song and chant ideas. Several teachers use audiotapes by Raffi. See [www.raffinews.com/catalogue/index.html](http://www.raffinews.com/catalogue/index.html) for a complete list of Raffi albums and videos. One teacher uses an audiotape by Stewart

## Video #4: Embedding Number Concepts

(If clicking on this video fails to launch video, download video separately from this site.)



(1996). Two of the preschool teachers use the following websites: [www.preschooleducation.com](http://www.preschooleducation.com) and [www.preschoolrainbow.org](http://www.preschoolrainbow.org). One teacher reports that her favorite source is: *The Best of The Mailbox Magazine*, with the following website address: [www.themailbox.com](http://www.themailbox.com). Some of the teachers use websites that provide new words to fit well-known songs, often referred to as “piggyback songs.” The following site features books that can be ordered by the title of “Piggyback Songs”: [www.directclassroom.com/noname2.html](http://www.directclassroom.com/noname2.html). Other useful sites include: [www.theteachersguide.com/songs](http://www.theteachersguide.com/songs), [www.kididdles.com/mouseum.index.html](http://www.kididdles.com/mouseum.index.html) (provides lyrics to common tunes), and [www.atozkidsstuff.com](http://www.atozkidsstuff.com).

Anita and Kim, preschool teachers, include chants that fit with their theme. For example, they recite chants about bumpy balls that emphasize positional concepts and chants to support passing objects. The words are changed to suit the objects being passed. The music, rhythm, and repetitious nature of chants can be integrated into group activities

that allow children to rehearse a variety of concepts in an enjoyable manner.

### Instructional Strategies

The teachers often use the following instructional strategies during Morning Circle: the embedding strategy, differentiated instruction, encouraging active engagement, and creating opportunities for students to communicate. The practice of embedding the instruction of individual I.E.P. objectives within meaningful activity-based instruction, is known as the *embedding* strategy in the early childhood literature (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, & McComas, 1998). One important benefit of this strategy is its potential to result in a greater number of opportunities for each child to receive instruction on individually appropriate content and skills (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2001). Increasing the amount of time spent on individual objectives is one factor that should support the achievement of I.E.P. objectives.

The teachers effectively apply the principles of *differentiated instruction* by individualizing the opportunities they create for

students and the responses they expect within a single lesson of the Circle routine. For example, one child in Ann's classroom stands and writes on a white wipe-off board, "Today is (day of the week), June 4, 2005. The weather is hot and sunny." Another child who is not yet writing sentences independently is provided with line drawings with the print words underneath. He copies the words onto the white board as his participation in the daily news.

The teachers *encourage active engagement* by providing opportunities for children to be physically engaged in the lessons. For example, during the *Five Speckled Frogs* song, Karen holds up a log upon which five speckled frogs are attached by velcro. Children take turns pulling off a frog, providing them with an opportunity to rehearse reaching and fine motor skills. Jill uses a similar set of materials for the *Five Little Ducks* song, also providing an opportunity for each child to pull off a duck. Karen uses beanbags that are placed on various body parts as instructed in a song. The use of the basket artifact gives each child an opportunity to select an object that will be integrated into the Circle lessons. Teachers also encourage active engagement by providing choices. Children make choices about when to volunteer, who to greet, and about which songs and books to enjoy during Circle.

The teachers create *opportunities for communication* by ensuring that each child has a functional form of expression, such as line drawings and or the use of voice output devices, that are available throughout Morn-

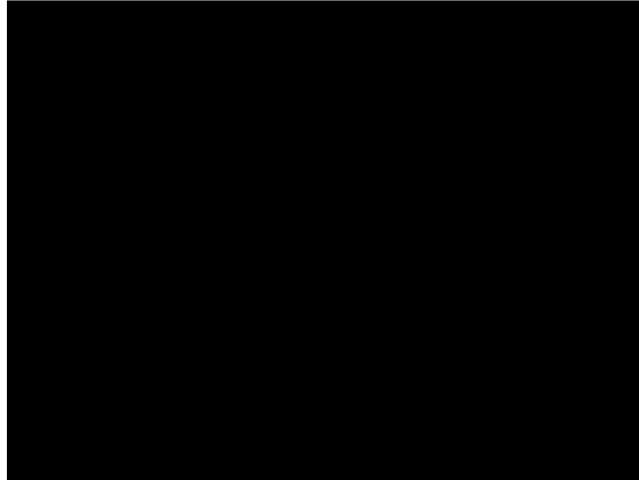
ing Circle. Liz incorporates the use of signs and line drawings during clean up time by presenting the sign or drawing as a label and a cue for each child to place the corresponding item in the basket. Some teachers use pause in statements to elicit or expand responses, such as signing and voicing, "Want \_\_\_\_\_" to encourage a child to express a two sign utterance. Key phrases that repeatedly occur in Circle support children to learn specific, appropriate responses. Although each child has a voice output device, Karen responds when a child chooses instead to vocalize, saying "Nice using your voice." *Video clip #5: Teacher Responsiveness* shows how children in Karen's room use single message voice output devices and her high level of responsiveness to their communication. Responding to students' communication expressed across forms (vocalization, sign, gesture, body language) sends an important message to students that they are important and valued members of the classroom community.

## Conclusion

Morning Circle offers students with disabilities a multitude of opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills. The learning needs of each student can be addressed by carefully embedding student objectives within the Circle routine and by providing appropriate accommodations. Across the components of the Morning Circle routine each child's contribution is valued while a sense of classroom community and culture is established.

## Video clip #5: Teacher Responsiveness

(If clicking on this video fails to launch video, download video separately from this site.)



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