



At Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate in Toronto, team leader Cathy Chant has paired off grade 9 students to work with Guiding Circles, in the Healthy Active Living Course, part of the Physical Education curriculum.

Last year, in a bold, innovative move, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) opted to pilot the Guiding Circles career development program to more than 50 teachers recruited from within the 557 schools that the board oversees.

It was a decision that, eventually, has the potential to positively change the futures of its many students, especially those in the 10-14-year-old age range.

“The Guiding Circles approach is an effective way of creating real understanding and communication,” says Vera Taylor, consulting manager of the Education Sector Council Partnership Project.

“It builds confidence and transforms the disenchanted into something more productive...in fact, it can be therapeutic,” she adds.

As a workbook-based program, the Guiding Circles series is a career exploration package that combines Aboriginal perspectives with contemporary career pathing strategies.

Ultimately, the purpose of the Guiding Circle program is to foster self-esteem, to restore hope and to create vision and, in doing so, lives can be changed for the better.

“The Toronto District School Board is being used as an innovative lab,” explains Taylor.

“The TDSB examined new models of schooling, with the intent of developing new programming...and the Guiding Circles method supports the development of four of our essential target areas,” she says.

Nine critical targets have been identified by the TDSB as important development goals including:

- Creation of sustainable partnerships.
- Development of nine essential skills (Guiding Circles).
- Expanded opportunities for experiential learning (Guiding Circles).
- New courses and program packages that are sector and skills focused.
- Career awareness for students (Guiding Circles).
- Parental awareness of new realities.
- Use of classroom resources with sector applications, websites and labour market information.
- Skills recognition and industry-recognized certificates and credentials.
- Effective transitions to work or post-secondary training (Guiding Circles).

“Guiding Circles was one of the highest rated initiatives with many teachers noting that it was practical and it was something they could work with right away,” Taylor says.

In fact, feedback from teachers said it was motivational, filled an important need and served to generate excellent discussion.

During the 2006/2007 school year, as some teachers were busy learning about the Guiding Circles method, a team of seven others were writing the curriculum modules so that the initiative could be field-tested, in various settings, during the 2007/2008 school year. The project is also incorporating Guiding Circles strategies into its work with parents as a key foundation for supporting their students in making career choices.

Once delivery is complete, at the end of 2009, the results will be documented by a researcher with the intent of propagating successful modules to other schools across Canada.

“My unit hopes to draw students inward to look at how their personality, combined with their values, can lead them towards more rewarding and successful work and life experiences,” says teacher, Tsahai Daley.

“The unit culminates with students creating life-sized posters of themselves that are made up of their character traits, values and the various connections they have amongst their family, friends and in the community,” Daley adds.

“In the end, students not only begin to understand that their personal style and values are not static and will continue to change and develop as they mature, but they will literally begin to see themselves as their most valuable career education resource.”

The project is co-funded by the Government of Canada, Sector Council Program, the Ontario Ministry of Education Student Success Initiative and the Toronto District School Board.

If your organization or community would like more information about Guiding Circles contact Trina Maher-Bučko, National Manager, Career Development Strategies at [tbucko@aboriginalhr.ca](mailto:tbucko@aboriginalhr.ca) or 866.711.5091.