Respecting the ‘circle’ process

As a Restorative Practices School the power of the “yarning circle” is well known to numerous teachers here at CSC. Since 2004, the circle has been utilised in Junior Secondary classrooms as the first step in a “No Blame” restorative process.

Importantly, student participation in the yarning circle promotes an awareness of Indigenous cultures, and as students have become familiar with the process, the circle is now a regular part of My Journey lessons.

What is a yarning circle?

Yarning is a term related to Indigenous Australian ways of sharing, inquiring and managing knowing about the world. It is a process that can equally apply to a form of storytelling or an informal but respectful conversation. Across our Junior Secondary school yarning has emerged as a:

- student led activity, often sitting in a circle, in classrooms or school grounds. The teacher hands over the leadership of the class to the group and becomes one of the group also sitting in the circle;
- a respectful process to share conversations, ideas and challenges with young people; and,
- a powerful restorative process.

Despite its informal overtones the circle is a powerful process that is used with consideration; it is not over-used and reserved for learning of significance.

Yarning has physical shape

It is obvious that yarning has a physical shape here at CSC. Yarning circles, whether small or large circles create a physical presence of shared power for all involved in the process.

Yarning takes place in a seated circle; either in a physical space (allotted yarning space) or a reorganised classroom with participants sitting on the floor or chairs facing each other. A yarning circle does not look like a lecture theatre or traditional classroom experience.

A yarning circle looks at one person talking and all others listening. Movement takes place around the circle in a clockwise direction.
Six Prepie classes create ‘Place of Wetland Birds’ mural

A magnificent mural has been completed by Prep students and has been installed on the fence in the Prep area of the Primary Campus.

Late last year with the help of local Indigenous artist Dee Yiindi-mincarlie and leadership of one of our brilliant teachers Mrs Fiona Towler, the mural was designed and created by the six Prep classes.

When asked about the mural Mrs Towler stated, “from the beginning I wanted the project to involve the kids as much as possible and for it to be a real life learning experience. I enlisted the help of Indigenous artist, Dee Yiindi-mincarlie who spent a day work-shopping with the six Prep classes, teaching them the symbols used in Indigenous art to represent journeys, waterholes, fireplaces and animal tracks. She spoke about our land in Sippy Downs and the animals that live in this area.

“I decided to use the symbol of the red-bellied black snake as the central symbol because it is a special snake for the local Indigenous people and the only snake I have ever seen on the College grounds. The snake divides the earth and sky and carries on its back the lake which gives Sippy Downs its name, meaning ‘Place of Wetland Birds’ in the local Indigenous language. Below the snake is the earth and the stories of its first human inhabitants who travelled across it and lived off its bounties. The black swan of Maroochy another Indigenous symbol of this area lifts out of the water. Along the base of the artwork are the handprints of all six classes done in the sage greens and buff colours of the grass through the seasons. The hands represent unity and harmony as they wave upwards”, added Mrs Towler.

She also expressed that it was a rush to complete the project and was sorry that there was no ceremony which the children could share in, but it is her hope that the students will carry with them the memories of being part of a communal project which celebrates the treasures of our place and acknowledges the first people who walked across the land.

Well done to all involved. The entire College community will enjoy the colours and the images which brighten up what was once a very dull wall.

On Sunday, 14 July NAIDOC celebrations will again take place in Cotton Tree Park. This year’s theme proudly celebrates the 50th anniversary of the presentation of the Yirrkala Bark Petitions to the Federal Parliament. All families in the Chancellor community are invited and encouraged to attend and join in the festivities on offer.

The Yirrkala Bark Petitions

In August 1963, the Yolngu people of Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land sent two bark petitions framed by traditional ochre paintings of clan designs to the Australian House of Representatives. The petitions protested the Commonwealth’s granting of mining rights on land excised from Arnhem Land reserve and sought the recognition by the Australian Parliament of the Yolngu peoples’ traditional rights and ownership of their lands. While appealing for the recognition of Yolngu rights to land, the Bark Petitions were a catalyst in advancing changes to the Constitution in the 1967 referendum, the statutory acknowledgment of Aboriginal land rights by the Commonwealth in 1976, and the overturning of the obstacle of the concept of terra nullius by the High Court in the Mabo Case in 1992 that recognised the traditional rights of the Meriam people to their islands in the eastern Torres Strait.

Today, we look to a future that better understands and celebrates the unique connection that Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander’s share to country, as we continue to build an Australia that reflects the achievements and furthers the aspirations of our people.