

Just the Same on the Inside

Understanding diversity and supporting inclusion in Circle Time



Juan Bornman, Margaret Collins
and Barbara Maines

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Stories by Juan Bornman and Barbara Maines
Activities by Margaret Collins

Illustrations by Simon Smith

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Editorial Team: Mel Maines, Sarah Lynch, Wendy Ogden
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Introduction

Circle Time is increasingly seen as a time to talk with children about themselves, their classroom and other issues of the day. Within the structure of Circle Time most children feel secure to talk about relationships, rules, fairness and difficulties. It is also a time for children to reflect on their behaviour towards one another and towards those less fortunate than themselves. Their circle enables them to listen, to have their say and to consider how their actions impinge on others; how what they do and say affects the tranquillity or otherwise of the classroom.

Circle Time is therefore an ideal opportunity to present stories about children who have difficulties, problems, disabilities or who, for some reason, find it awkward or uncomfortable to settle easily into a classroom situation. By talking about these situations, using stories as a vehicle for discussion and following these with activities children can be helped to learn to understand and appreciate peers who are in some way different from themselves. Empathising with others and understanding their needs is good citizenship.

This aspect of citizenship is about being aware of, how to relate to, and how to treat other people, whatever their ability, colour, race or creed. Some children may not be taught this at home so it is essential to include it in everyday teaching at school. Much awareness of how to treat people is caught, not taught; it is therefore essential that teachers and all other people in school show their respect to those who have difficulties because of a disability, whether physical, emotional, a learning difficulty or a difference due to circumstances.

It is not easy to help children to feel good about themselves; it is even more difficult to help children with special needs to feel 'good enough'. Children with conditions that leave them challenged or who lack the ability to perform as well as other children need support not only from their teachers but also from their peers.

To achieve an inclusive society we need to help people to put themselves in the place of others, especially those with special needs, to learn empathic and caring responses. This has to begin in childhood and what better place than in the classroom?

This book has been written to help teachers, other adults working with groups of children and children in primary schools to understand some of the difficulties and conditions of those with special needs of various kinds.

This book is arranged in ten sections – about ten young people with very different and very special needs.

Each section has:

- ▶ an adult information page
- ▶ a story to be read to the children
- ▶ a set of activities for children aged 6 to 8
- ▶ a set of activities for children aged 9 to 11.

There is also a short list of books for suggested reading at the end of this introductory section.

The adult's pages contain supplementary information about the condition of the person in the story together with a few suggested websites and in some cases books that can help. There are many websites that older children can be encouraged to visit, not only the ones suggested, but others that they will find by using a search engine.

The children in these stories have special needs – the stories themselves will lead primary aged children to ask questions in order to gain an understanding of the conditions and the various needs of the children in the stories.

The activities have been planned to extend the main points of the stories and to give children something to do or practise that will help them to understand and empathise with the various conditions. Though they are arranged in two sets – one for younger children aged 6 to 8 years and one for older children of 9 to 11 years, you may, depending on the abilities of the children in your class, want to dip into either section.

The activities would also be suitable for individual or small group work with children with special needs in your class, in special schools and in hospital schools. Your classroom assistant or special needs helper could help here with individual attention.

In some cases, the activities have direct links to activities in other sections and these are indicated on the adult's pages.

Some of the activities can lead to displays of children's work as a means of sharing the work with visitors, other adults and children in the school. Other activities can lead to projects that children can undertake as homework, holiday work or research at home with members of their family.

Older children who are more aware of news items on the TV, radio or in newspapers can be encouraged to learn about, and share, what is actually going on in the world with regard to people who are disadvantaged, disabled or displaced.

Acknowledgements for the Stories

Football Fun

Jill Rose, a physiotherapist with a lot of experience in this field, and friend who shares my passion for explaining disability to kids, worked with me on this story, giving me sound advice. Her insight, commitment and dedication to children with disability have always inspired me.

Magic Moments at Burger Bite

The input of Magda Lourens (formerly President of Down's syndrome South Africa, and the mum of an 11 year old son with Down's syndrome) is gratefully acknowledged. She helped me to understand this syndrome from a personal perspective and taught me what medical textbooks had failed to do, making this story one that many people can relate to.

Kyle and the Hairdresser

The input of Maureen Casey (remedial teacher) is gratefully acknowledged. Through her wealth of experience in this field, she made Kyle and the hairdresser come to life in my mind. Thank you!

Toni and the Boy who was Different

The input of Christine Koudstaal (Head: Unica School for children with Autism in Pretoria, South Africa) is gratefully acknowledged. She shared a wealth of knowledge and experience, shaping my thinking about autism.

My Sister Chantelle

The input of Joanne Atterbury (specialist teacher at the Memorial Institute for Child Health and Development) is much appreciated. She shared her experience in this field and provided many real life examples.

Books for suggested reading

Alcott, M. (1997) *An introduction to children with special educational needs*, Hodder & Stoughton, Abingdon.

Dare, A., O'Donovan, M. (1997) *Good Practice in Caring for Young Children with Special Needs*, Stanley Thornes, Cheltenham.

Feldman, W. (2000) *The Daily Telegraph*, Learning and Attention Disorders, Robinson, London.

Sainsbury, C., (2000) *Martian in the Playground*, Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd., Bristol.

Stakes, R., Hornby, G. (1996) *Meeting Special Needs in Mainstream Schools, A practical guide for teachers*, David Fulton, London.

Thacker, J., Strudwich, D., Babbedge, E., (2002) *Educating Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, Inclusive practice in mainstream schools*, Routledge Falmer, London.



Football Fun

1. Football Fun

Information

The following story is about a boy who has cerebral palsy (CP). It is thought that about one in 400 people has this condition and nowadays fit well into mainstream schooling. It is important to help children to be aware of the difficulties of CP sufferers, to feel empathy for them and to understand ways they can help. The suggested activities reflect this need for awareness and understanding.

Some people with CP are of higher than average intelligence; other people with CP have moderate or severe learning difficulties. Most, like the majority of people without CP, are of average intelligence.

Cerebral palsy is a physical impairment that affects movement. It is not a disease or illness. Some movement problems are hardly noticeable but some are severe. All CP people are different, no two people with CP have the same difficulties,.

Cerebral palsy includes various conditions. There are three main types which correspond to damage in different parts of the brain:

- ▶ Ataxic CP presents as a balance problem. Sometimes there are shaky hand movements and difficulty with speech.
- ▶ People with athetoid CP lose some control of their posture and they often make unwanted movements.
- ▶ People with spastic CP have some muscles that are stiff and weak, especially when they move. This affects their control of movement.

CP has various causes:

- ▶ failure of a part of the brain to develop, either before birth or in early childhood
- ▶ complications in labour, premature birth or illness just after birth
- ▶ infections during pregnancy, infancy or early childhood, for example, meningitis or encephalitis
- ▶ occasionally CP is an inherited disorder.

Problems include difficulty with:

- ▶ walking, feeding, talking or using their hands
- ▶ sitting up without support – some need constant enabling
- ▶ sight, hearing, perception and learning
- ▶ epilepsy