

*Looking Outside the Circle –
Circle time for SPHE Curriculum Strand ‘Myself and the Wider World’.*
Bernie Collins.

Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education: St. Patrick’s College,
Drumcondra, 2015. 146pp.

Book Review

This is a brief overview of the content of the book, *Looking Outside the Circle – Circle time for SPHE Curriculum Stand ‘Myself and the Wider World’* by Bernie Collins and how I found using it with fifth class. The book delivers exactly what the title suggests it is going to deliver. It covers all the strand units within the strand of ‘Myself and the Wider World’ at each class level. In the organised layout of the sessions, worksheets and resource sheets in the book the author achieves her purpose.

All primary school teachers and those studying to become primary school teachers would benefit from reading this book and would find it extremely useful in the classroom at all class levels. In the book’s introduction, the author provides the necessary background information to the purpose of the book. Guidelines for using the Circle Time Approach are supplied and a typical structure of Circle Time is outlined. How to use the materials in the sessions and in planning for SPHE is also well explained as is the role of the teacher in the sessions.

Sessions based on Developing Citizenship and Media Education are provided for Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First and Second Classes. Sessions based on these two strand units together with Environmental Care are provided for Third and Fourth Classes. Finally, fourteen sessions are provided under the strand units of Developing Citizenship, National, European and Wider Communities, Environmental Care and Media Education are provided for Fifth and Sixth Classes. The appendix consists of explanations of games which are clear and concise.

While there are materials available about the Circle Time approach, Bernie Collins’ book is unique in that it is based on the Irish primary school curriculum. It is also a huge contribution to SPHE in that it focuses on wider world issues which as she states ‘can promote social justice/citizenship/democratic principles within a community, and at national or global levels, but also that this can feed back into classroom culture and practice in a way that enhances classroom relationships and children’s personal development’ (p.1).

Her professional expertise and research completed is obvious in the layout of each session at each class level. Materials and the content objectives being addressed are clearly identified. Any resources required, activity sheets and cross-curricular links are also highlighted for each session. She provides a rationale for the approach taken in the session for the teacher in the form of an introduction for each session. I found all of these extremely helpful and useful in my own teaching and use of the materials.

This book is very well written and presented in a teacher-friendly layout (colourful, accessible and well-structured). Throughout my teaching career I always found that I had to gather information for sessions based on the Strand of 'Myself and the Wider World' from a variety of sources every year while there were so many materials and programmes available for the other strands in SPHE. As a result, I feel that this book really supports teachers providing us with materials which address this particular strand and its contents objectives in an informative way in its well-presented sessions while also incorporating circle time. It really is an invaluable resource to have in every primary school and college of education in Ireland.