

# A Teacher's Right to Thrive:

## Exploring Care and Harm in Education through a Healing Circle Model

### The Context

#### The Problem:

- Teaching professionals have been positioned through history to shoulder the shortcomings of an education system that exploits them.
- Teachers have long been targeted by systems of domination - what bell hooks referred to as the “[imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy](#)” - that ally to produce harm at multiple levels, impacting how we feel about ourselves, how we show up in relationships, the policies and practices of an organization, and the ideas and beliefs that shape culture.

#### The Proclamation:

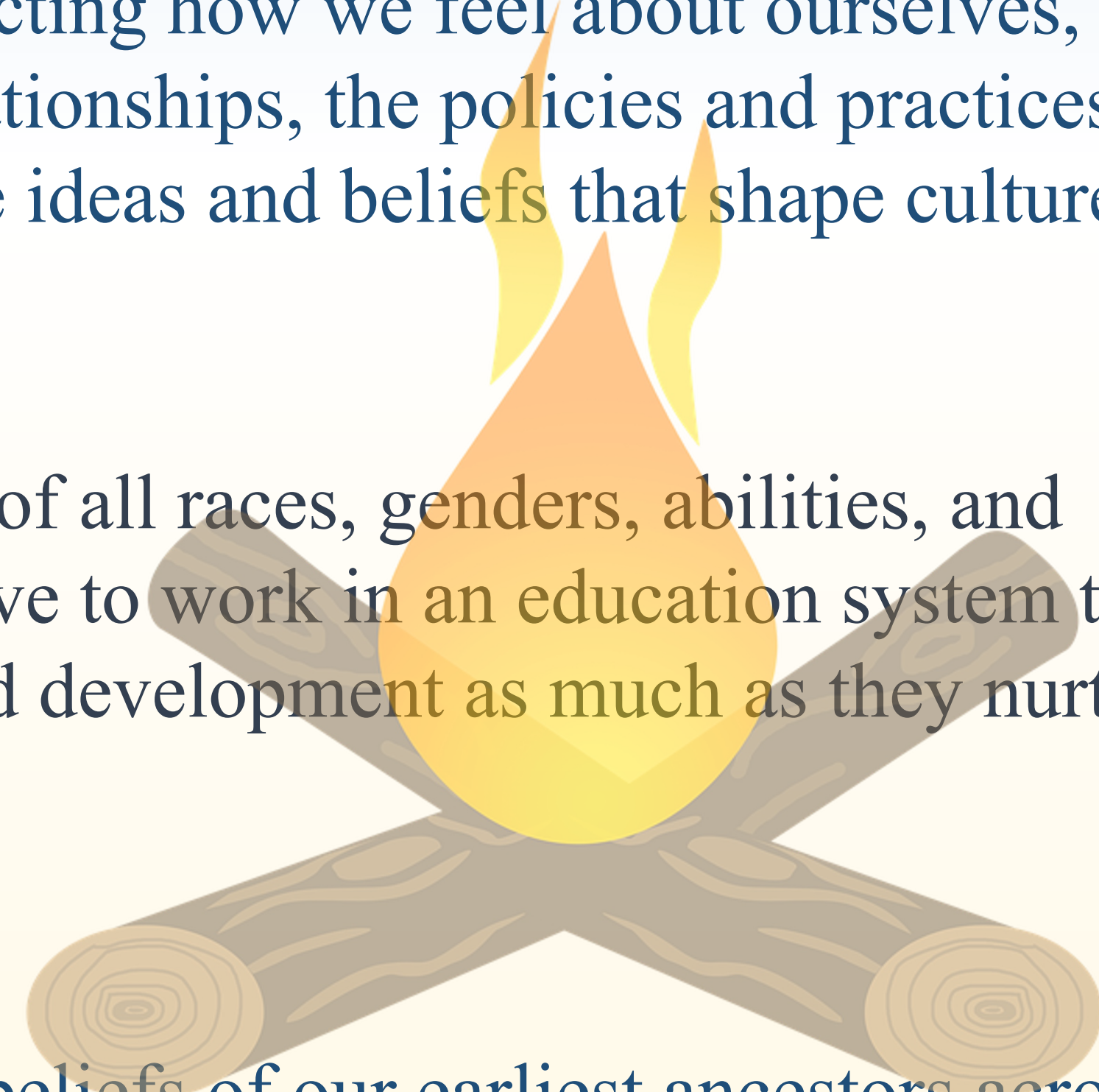
- Teaching professionals of all races, genders, abilities, and lived experiences deserve to work in an education system that nurtures their health and development as much as they nurture our nation's learners.

#### The Legacy:

- Born from the cultural beliefs of our earliest ancestors across the earth, circle tradition has been preserved through enduring Indigenous stewardship for centuries.
- Communities targeted by systems of harm acutely understand the need for collective care and well-being, leading the movement toward systems that heal and working to counteract the impact of persistent conditions that suppress, stress, and routinely retraumatize.
- Honoring a right to thrive against institutions and ideologies that see and treat some people as less deserving than others, these communities continue to innovate ways and spaces for members to gather, connect, and prioritize wellness in a world actively working against it and them.

#### The Circle:

- [“A healing circle is the process undertaken to promote healing based upon Native traditional belief systems.”](#)
- [“The Circle has healing power. In the Circle we are all equal... The Sacred Circle is designed to create unity. The Hoop of Life is also a circle. On this hoop there is a place for every species, every race, every tree, and every plant.”](#)



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healingearlychildhood@gmail.com

## An Invitation

Lay a hand on your heart.

Slow your breathing.

Notice the sensations.

Healing begins the moment  
we invite it in.



### Experience a Circle

Nature Based Educators

Early Educators

### The Research

#### The Purpose:

- Develop and assess a healing circle series curriculum that promotes the healing and well-being of early educators working in environments that erode teacher wellness.

#### The Curriculum:

- The Healing Early Childhood (HEC) circle series curriculum is composed of 8 circle session outlines that explore personalized invitations for individual and community reflection, meditation, visualization, sensory experiences, music, movement, whimsy, and deeper dreaming.
- Session themes include *Creating Community, Culture/ Race/ Identity, Agency, Relationship, Meaning, and Aspirations.*

#### The Research Questions:

- How does this curriculum fulfill its purpose to support early childhood educator healing and well-being?
- What are the curriculum's strengths?
- What areas can be improved?

#### The Process:

- Data was collected from 5 expert reviewers with multi-disciplinary expertise in the following areas:
  - early childhood education and/ or child development
  - [healing centered engagement framework](#)
  - healing circles and/ or [talking circle traditions](#), and
  - mental health and/ or wellness.
- A 24-question survey of 20 Likert scale and four open-ended questions were administered for study instrumentation.

#### The Results:

- Experts across discipline **strongly agree** that the HEC Circle Series curriculum supports early educator healing and well-being in the following ways:
  - Reflective questions that promote deeper inquiry
  - Grounding and sensory experiences for embodied healing within and beyond the circle setting, and
  - Cultivating a sense of collective strength, belonging and connection to others