



"What is a Learning Circle?" Scenario Activity

Background: P2PU is a strong advocate for learning circles, but the concept of peers learning together to address common challenges predates our organization by thousands of years. Therefore, we don't think we should tell you exactly what is or what isn't a learning circle - that is for you to decide. From our perspective, there are a few core values that are essential in any learning circle, but beyond that, it's up to you. In order to help you come up with your own working definition, we've compiled a number of "borderline" scenarios - real life examples of learning experiences that definitely shared some, but maybe not all, core values of a learning circle. We've found that talking through these is an excellent way to come up with your own definition.

Goals: Help a group of people determine their own definition of a learning circle.

Materials: Scissors, 1 large piece of paper per group, at least 2 pens per group

Ideal size: 4+. For large groups, divide into smaller groups of 4-8

Instructions:

1. Cut out each scenario, and present each group with a set of their own set.
2. Allow each group 20-25 minutes to read through the examples, and note characteristics, values, and methods that they see across the scenarios on a large piece of paper.
3. When the time is finished, ask each table to take 5 minutes to come up with their own definition of a learning circle.
4. Have each group share their definition, and state any places where they had a difficult time.
5. If there are any common difficulties, speak as a larger group about what does and does not constitute a learning circle for your particular situation.

#1: After taking the Science of Happiness online course, a number of participants who live near each other decide that they want to keep meeting at the library informally to discuss self-improvement ideas and how to live happier lives. They continue to meet every week to share and talk about happiness strategies without a facilitator.

#2: A group of people come together for a learning circle on community journalism. When they arrive, the facilitator tells everyone the online course on community journalism is no longer available and no other comparable course can be found. The group decides to talk about what their goals are and together they identify some readings, videos, and friends who can help them. The group continues to meet for two months. No online course or pre-set curriculum is ever used.

#3: Five strangers come together at their local community center to take an online course after seeing a flyer at a nearby coffee shop. They introduce themselves and then spend the rest of the 2 hours looking through course content individually. They meet again for the following few weeks but except for an introduction and brief question or two, they do not converse as a group.

#4: A group of neighbors decide to come together to try to make their neighborhood more safe. They choose to meet once a week at the same time and come up with solutions and plans, although no one of them is the expert on the topic. Their discussion is guided by a few printed resources including the Safe Communities How-to Guide.

#5: A librarian organizes a weekly coding meeting for 15 people. The librarian arranged months in advance to have guest speakers from local tech businesses speak for 30 minutes each week.

#6: Ten people who are interested in public speaking come to the library to watch Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. They have a brief discussion afterwards and do not meet again.

#7: A community center advertises a 6-week long program in which peers meet weekly to go through an online course to help them find jobs and improve their resume and interview skills. In order to be listed on the community center's job board at the end, the center asks that each participant pay \$10.

#8: Six graduate students form a weekly study circle to review each week's lecture materials. At the end of the semester, each student feels like the group study experience helped them excel in the class.

#9: A librarian advertises a learning circle for advanced Excel training. On the first day, somebody shows up who is a beginner. The librarian asks this person to leave, as they do not have the prerequisites required for the learning circle. The rest of the group meets weekly and things go well.

#10: An ESOL teacher adapts the methodology of learning circles to make her classroom more participatory. Even though the students aren't using computers, the teacher is her own teaching resources to help guide the discussion each week.

#11 A climate scientist finds out that people in his local area are very interested in understanding climate change. He decides to offer a learning circle at his local recreation center. He decides to use the same curriculum from when he taught a course on climate change at the local university last fall. Most meetings consist of a 60 minute lecture and a short discussion afterwards.

#12 A religious group comes together to study the bible and they think the P2PU dashboard system is a great way to organize learners.

#13 A gardening group has been using MeetUp for a long time, and they're been frustrated that they now have to pay. Someone suggests using the P2PU system to organize weekly meetups for local gardeners to come together, talk, and work in different community gardens.

#14 A group of 5 people sign up for a HTML learning circle at a public library. After 6 weeks, everybody has had a good experience but only two people have finished all the course materials.