EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: A TOOLKIT FOR PROMOTING LEARNING CIRCLES

Partners in Adult Learning

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Notes

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Partners

UNITED KINGDOM www.enfield.gov.uk

The Lead Partner of this project is Enfield Community Learning Service, London Borough of Enfield. The Local Authority is responsible for a range of services such as social services, roads, public health, the environment, community development and education. Its adult education service provides first step opportunities for those who are low skilled, lacking basic skills such as English, Maths and ICT, and those who want to return to learning or seeking employment. The borough is becoming increasingly diverse with people from many different parts of the world coming to settle in Enfield.

Other UK partners

Futuretrend Technologies http://www.futuretrend.co.uk/

Futuretrend Technologies has been providing training and solutions in IT, graphic design and web development since December 2000. The primary focus of the organisation is to help clients make effective use of IT, Media technologies for either business or personal success. Futuretrend Technologies were able to organise and facilitate the running of the pilot learning circle in Enfield.

SAMAFAL Somali Families Association

Samafal Somali Families Association (SSFA) has been established to support Somali women and their families to overcome barriers and integrate widely into other communities in 2008. Somali Families Association was involved in running the learning circle with a group of Somali women.

FRANCE www.ifaid.org

IFAID Aquitaine is a non-profit organisation established in 1986, mainly financed by public institutions (Regional Council of Aquitaine, ESF, French Labour Ministry, Lifelong Learning Programme, focusing on training and supporting projects that aim to achieve sustainable development in both developed and developing countries. IFAID Aquitaine supports non-profit organisations, local authorities, community development workers and job seekers. IFAID Aquitaine has coordinated and participated in many different lifelong learning projects since 2006, e.g. Leonardo TOI mobility, and Grundtvig partnerships.

IFAID Aquitaine has two main acitivities:

- Substantial professional training programme (Master's Degree) in community development and social economy project management;
- Support to the non-profit organisations in their community development and social economy project.

Other French partners

The city of Bordeaux, with a population of 242,945 inhabitants, is the 9th largest city in France. It is the capital of the Aquitaine region, in the south west of France, as well as the prefecture of the Gironde department.

The local library of "Bordeaux Lac" is located in "les Aubiers" neighborhood in the north of Bordeaux city. The library actively contributed to the PALS project by running a learning circle, hosting European partners and contributing towards writing sections of the toolkit.

PORTUGAL   http://www.raiseitnow.org.pt/

Raise It Now – Associação (RIN) is a non-profit NGO based in Loures, Portugal, founded in June 2010. The mission of the organisation is the promotion of social economy and entrepreneurship values. RIN plays a fundamental role in local and regional community through the promotion of an effective dialogue between youth organisations and civil society. It is actively involved in the creation of an integrated structure of social education and empowerment of young people, aiming to promote and certify the acquisition of skills and competences.

The organisation offers informative sessions that focus on strategies to improve employability using non-formal education methodologies, entrepreneurship workshops, vocational orientation sessions, coaching and counseling sessions, seminars, networking events, study visits to successful projects, workshops for young people who drop out of school to provide carrier guidance and alternatives in the education system.

Other Portuguese partners

Created in the 26th of July 1886, the Municipality of Loures belongs to the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon and is located on the right bank of the Tagus river. It covers an area of 168 square kilometres and has a population of almost 200,000 inhabitants. Loures municipality is responsible for a highly contrasted territory where rural landscapes and urban environments coexist. It is a Local Public Authority and a relevant decision maker regarding the implementation of local policies. It develops multiple activities in the social and economic realms as well as in the fields of urban planning, environment, culture, sport, education, housing, cultural heritage, health, safety and tourism.

Since 1998 this borough has developed several policies regarding social inclusion and intercultural dialogue. Within the Department for Culture, Sports and Youth, José Saramago Public Library (JSPL) aims to promote lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen the local communities and promoting learning opportunities for people with low literacy.

ROMANIA   **www.aesd.ro**

AESD Calarasi, Romania - Association for Education and Sustainable Development was founded in February 2007. The goal of the association is to promote lifelong learning in society in order to facilitate the development of active citizenship, social cohesion and employment.

The main activities are delivery of formal and informal education, building on organised system of consulting, information and training. One of the activities of the association is to analyse the needs of the region and to create a network of local centres of distance learning, easily accessed by learners including those adults who are at risk of social marginalisation.

Other Romanian partners

Calarasi County Council is the administrative unit for Calarasi County since January 1981. Calarasi County is situated in south-east of Romania, on the left bank of Danube River and Borcea Branch. It covers an area of 5,088 square kilometres with more than 300,000 inhabitants.

Calarasi County Council is a public authority established at the county level that is based on the principles of local autonomy and decentralisation of public services. It has a role in coordination of municipal councils, town and city and the public services of county interest. The institution has secured the premises for carrying out the first learning circle.

Nicolae Titulescu School was set up in 1934 and built thanks to the voluntary contributions of citizens. First it comprised 2 classrooms, a hall and a chancellery, then due to increased population in 1962 there were 3 more classrooms added. In 1969, the school took the premises of the pedagogic high school, a modern building with 8 classrooms. Due to the increased demand of growing population the school extended again with 4 more classrooms in 1974 and once again in 1999 with 20 classrooms, 4 laboratories and more administrative rooms. Today Nicolae Titulescu School is a modern school with very high academic results. The school plays an active role in the community life and hosted a learning circle with some of its teaching staff actively involved in the process.

Chapter 1: Introduction

PALS stands for Partners in Adult Learning and is a collaborative pan-European project funded by Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme to promote and develop a culture of learning among adults and to explore if, and how, the Learning Circle structure might be used to reach those disadvantaged and marginalised adult learners. These learners frequently '*fall through the net*', have no recourse to improve their circumstances, and especially if female, are often effectively barred by ethnic, familial, and sometimes cultural barriers from accessing the means to self-improvement. It was to provide some system to break this circle of self-reinforcing prohibition that this European initiative was conceived.

The principal partners believe passionately that something has to be done to establish means and pathways of enabling adults to acquire a voice and form the aspiration to learn. Once established as part of the social landscape these pathways to learning will, in time, become sufficiently familiar and non-threatening that they will provide an accessible means of access to basic education in essential communicative skills, which is the fundamental first step to escaping poverty, abuse, deprivation, isolation and a subsistence existence in the cultural ghetto that an inability to communicate so frequently creates.

The primary focus of project activities was informal learning and the way in which the Learning Circle facilitates and encourages even those who are fearful of a formal learning to feel confident and comfortable in a safe learning environment. It can incorporate learners from very different backgrounds and with widely varying expectations and has the inestimable advantage that it can effectively promote curiosity.

This is an important project but is itself only a first step. We sincerely hope and trust that it will promote interest, funding and subsequent research and support to foster learning pathways that are genuinely accessible for those who are isolated by their inability to communicate, without hope and who see no possible improvement in their future and prospects. It is a tragedy of the developed world that adulthood all too often carries the assumption on the part of all who deal with adults that they must have these basic functional skills, thus reinforcing the prohibitions of isolation and even augmenting their number with social embarrassment and shame.

Background

The United Kingdom partner London Borough of Enfield had carried out research which showed that as at November 2010 that 29% of working age adults in Edmonton Green (a priority target area) receive out of work benefits; and 21% of

Enfield's population are classified as working poor (minimum wage) [Local Economic Assessment Report November 2010]. These figures exemplify the extent of deprivation within the Borough and one of the principal means of combating deprivation is through enabling far wider access to education and improvement.

Partner Ifaid Acquitaine operates from Bordeaux France and they too are in an area where there are significant pockets of deprivation that have proved resistant to mainstream initiatives. Across the board the financial crisis and severe reductions in funding has exacerbated these problems.

Partners agreed that they did not wish to simply duplicate existing provision, nor simply build upon existing new initiatives but they wanted to try a different informal approach that the target cohort would immediately recognise as not part of a structured educational programme. The Learning Circle has a number of advantages including a flat non-hierarchical structure, the absence of a formal teacher or tutor, a self-governing model and freedom to direct or influence the learning goals. Participants meet as equals, individual's life experiences are as valuable as formal attainments and the model fosters a collaborative common goal approach. It was this structure that was adopted for the pilots run by the project.

A real advantage of the Learning Circle is that it has the potential to drive legacy activities. In one pilot the members themselves wanted to continue meeting and developing their ideas and group actions after the initial Circle had completed its term. They did so and it is exactly this type of stimulated aspiration in action that the project partners hope will materialise from the use of this toolkit. Community based informal learning structures can not only reach those who would otherwise eschew the learning process but have the genuine potential to seed other such groups and activities broadening reach, effect and social penetration.

It was an important aspect of project activity that the materials, process and the product were all informed by the varying experience and knowledge shared between the international partners so that the toolkit is not simply a reflection of a single national interest or experience.

Definition of a Learning Circle
A Learning Circle is a small informal group that meets to study a subject of interest to its members. The members of a Learning Circle share their knowledge and experience, learn new information and apply and test new skills. The Learning Circle is a structure of small group meetings drawing on the knowledge and experience of a group.

"…*Learning Circles are built upon the idea that every member has something to contribute and that every member has something to learn*…"[1]

In its simplest form a Learning Circle is a group of individuals who meet on a series of occasions (either in person or through video conferencing or the Internet) for the purpose of developing their learning and understanding of an agreed topic. Often this is a problem or particular issue of concern to the participating individuals but is not limited to those situations. The motivator for an individual can simply be to meet new people.

The Learning Circle is a task-based learning group in contrast to a practice-based or knowledge-based learning community. Effective learning circle work involves building a level of trust and developing shared norms of trust, openness and reciprocity.[2]

There are a number of definitions of a Learning Circle and there is no one correct definition that accurately reflects the scale and diversity of application. The PALS members adopted two definitions that are perhaps the most helpful:

"*A Learning Circle is a series of discussions, demonstrations, reports on readings and presentations through which the members of the Learning Circle share their knowledge and experience, learn new information and apply and test new skills.*

It is …

- *a small informal group that meets to study a subject or body of knowledge of interest to its members*
- *a way of structuring a series of small group meetings to draw on the knowledge and experience of a group of people.*"[3] Rudi Aksim (2010)

The second definition formulated by Margaret Riel (2006) as follows:

- *"Learning Circles, generically described, are small diverse, democratic groups of people (generally 6-12) who meet regularly over a specified period of time to focus their different perspectives into a common understanding of an issue or problem. The discussions take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.*
- *The goal is deeper understanding by the participants and their efforts are often directed towards the construction of a final product or recommendation for a course of action."[4]* Margaret Riel (2006)

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[1] http://www.pioneernetwork.net/Data/Documents/LearningCircleKeane.pdf

[2] http://openedpractices.org/practice/learning-circles-making-good-use-social-capital-students

[3] Aksim, R. (2010) http://www.magma.ca/~raksim/learning_circle_basics.htm#what

In practice the project found that one cardinal virtue of the Learning Circle model was that the members or participants tended to formulate their own rules and procedures in ways that reflected their origins, cultures, understanding and needs. A major advantage of the structure is that it is so adaptable and that individuals form those collaborative forums which best suit themselves. This has the benefit that Circles almost by default self-direct towards efficient and useful discussion sessions.

Riel again observed that:

> *"A learning circle is a highly interactive participatory structure for organising group work. The goal is to build, share, and express knowledge through a process of open dialogue and deep reflection around issues or problems with a focus on a shared outcome."* Margaret Riel (2006)

It is the interaction between participants that gives the Learning Circle the opportunity to foster and promote learning.

Figure 1: Diagram of a Learning Circle

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[4] Riel, M. (2006) https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined
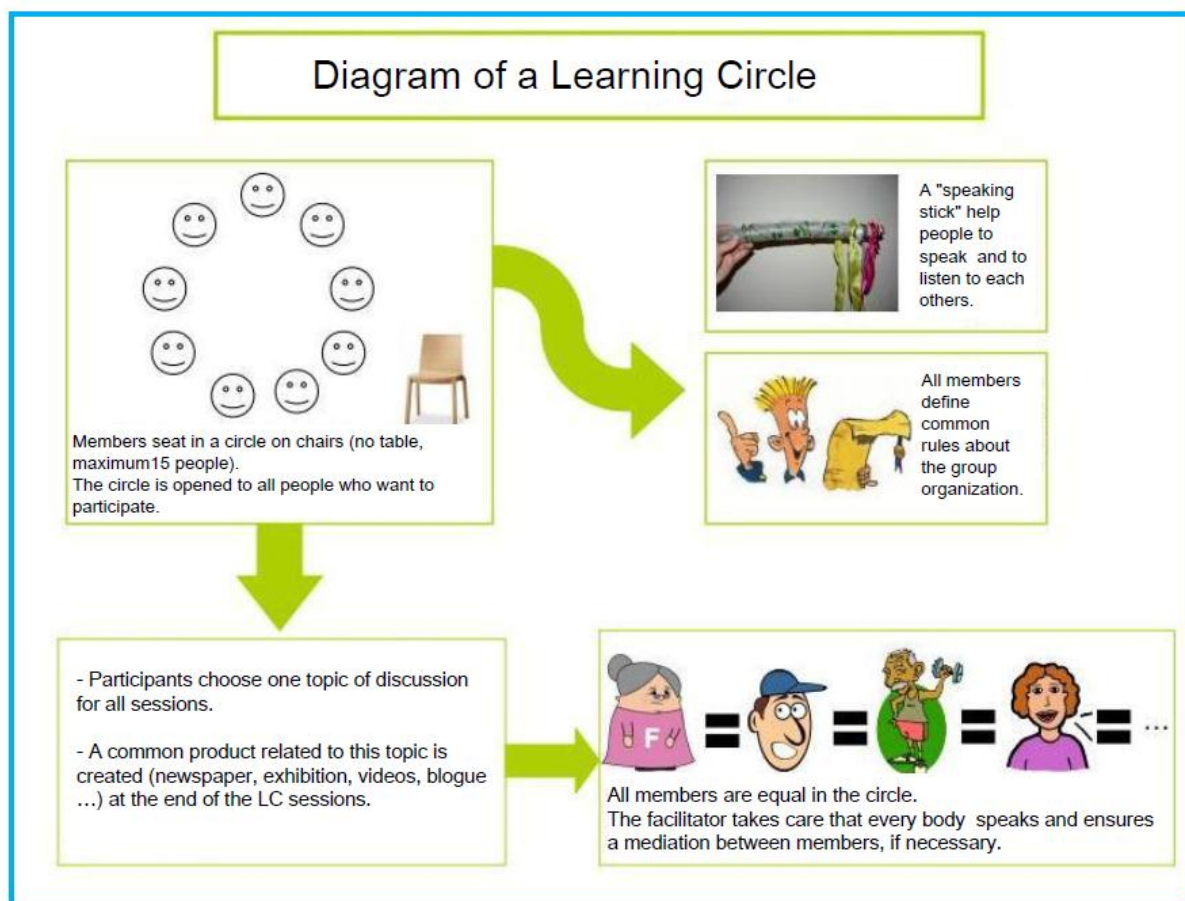
Contrast with the traditional classroom

A Learning Circle is not a traditional classroom, with a formal learning structure usually based upon an expert teacher in a hierarchical structure. In contrast, Learning Circles are informal with no expert tutor, driven by the desire to assimilate knowledge within the group primarily from their own knowledge and experience.

They are particularly suited to those who for whatever reason eschew the formal learning process and can be held informally in any convenient location, for example, library or coffee shop. It is the informal structure which attracts members and allows the Circle to reach those who would not normally engage in learning and who lack the confidence to believe they can contribute to such a process.

Learning Circles and how they meet local initiatives

Alignment with local initiatives - London Borough of Enfield, UK

Social Media and social networking (2011)

A key current Enfield programme is "*Social media and social networking: how it can be used to effectively promote the council and improve engagement with residents and service users*"[5]. Under the auspices of the project a Learning Circle was advertised and set up to introduce participants to social media. There was a keen response and many participants said that their children use social media all the time but that they could not do so and they were worried about issues of security and exposure. The results informed future decision making and influenced the direction and emphasis of resource allocation within the Enfield adult learning programme. The United Kingdom nationwide Adult Learners' Week agenda was revised to reflect the information and learner agenda was revised to reflect the data and learner experience from this project activity.

An investigation of the impact on demographic change on Schools and Children's Services in Enfield (2012)

A current Enfield policy on schools and education *"An investigation of the impact on demographic change on Schools and Children's Services in Enfield (2012)"*[6] identified as a key challenge "*The increasing diversity and emergence of new communities*" in the borough. A Learning Circle set up by the project for Somali women from that community within the borough produced quite unanticipated results and again the members have continued to meet. Some members are actively disseminating the ideal of informal education, as exemplified by the Learning Circle, within their own communities and it has provided a means of communication within the female Somali community. The particular point that arose was that there was a very strong feeling among the women that they had simply hitherto been unable to articulate or communicate to any authority that

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[5] Griffiths, Susan (2011) Social media and social networking: how it can be used to effectively promote the council and improve engagement with residents and service users. Enfield Council
[6] Griffiths, Susan (2012) *An investigation of the impact on demographic change on Schools and Children's Services in Enfield.* Enfield Council

across the board all the women members were sufficiently disenchanted with the quality of the educative provision in Enfield that even though they are in a low income bracket almost all of them arranged and paid for additional private tuition for their children.

The information was passed to the relevant Assistant Director of Schools and Children's Services who raised the issue formally with the Enfield Parent Engagement Panel and with the educational institutions involved with service delivery.

Enfield State of the Environment 2010/2011
Enfield Why do people drop litter? 2012
Enfield's Community Cohesion Strategy 2010 – 2014

The first and primary identified key aim under the community cohesion strategy is "*That local people play an active part in civic and community life, and contribute to local decision making.*"[7] A group of all third county nationals living in Enfield but otherwise from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures united in their aim to achieve British citizenship were already enrolled in a programme to drive integration. The project promoted the adoption of sustainable lifestyle choices and practices.[8] The Learning Circle structure was introduced to these women who thereafter, of their own volition, adopted the structure and have continued the meetings and their informal learning. The facilitator raised the issue of litter and fly-tipping in the borough and that this was becoming a more widespread problem.[9] Some members admitted that they personally fly-tipped on the basis that the Council would then come and collect the rubbish – this was partly a cultural inherited practice from their country of origin. The Circle also touched on different perceptions of what constitutes litter such as cigarette butts, chewing gum and food scraps. Circle activity has not only promoted the integrative agenda but has also allowed other members of their various communities to become involved and participate in the learning process.

Alignment with local initiatives - IFAID Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France

IFAID means «institut de Formation et d'Appui aux Initiatives de Développement », which can be translated as training institute and support for development initiatives. Indeed, one of aim of this non-profit organisation is to support local organisations and communities in developing community development projects.

During PALS project IFAID Aquitaine worked with local organisations of "les Aubiers" neighbourhood in the north of Bordeaux city. IFAID Aquitaine delivered a training about learning circles to local organisations and supported the "Bordeaux lac" library in running a learning circle. In addition, IFAID organised meetings

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7 Enfield's Community Cohesion Strategy 2010 – 2014. Enfield Council
8 Enfield State of the Environment 2010/2011. Enfield Council
9 Enfield Why do people drop litter? 2012. Enfield Council

between PALS European partners and the "Bordeaux Lac" library in order to develop potential relations in the future between these different European Partners.

IFIAD Aquitaine hopes that this project will make it possible for other organisations to participate in European partnership activities in the future. It is one of IFAID Aquitaine objectives to develop European project opportunities.

IFAID involved six students/ trainees in the European PALS project meeting and training on facilitation of Learning Circles hosted by London Borough of Enfield (UK). Trainees took an active part in all project co-ordination activities throughout the project duration.

As a result of the training received in London, IFAID students/trainees were able to organise and deliver a training session on running learning circles for local organisations in Bondeaux. The benefits of the European Lifelong Learning programme and the tools for running Learning Circles were shared with all other IFAID students / trainees (38 people in total).

Alignment with local initiatives – Raise It Now, Loures, Portugal

Raise It Now – Associação (RIN) is a non-profit organisation founded in Loures in June of 2010. Since its establishment the organisations has been actively involved in the creation of an integrated structure of social education and empowerment of local communities. Its philosophy is working in partnership with other organisations for the benefit of society.

Raise It Now is partner of a Portuguese social co-operative that incorporates five portuguese NGOs. Each NGO works in different fields including environment, social inclusion and cooperation for development, entrepreneurship and social economy, arts and culture and intergenerational dialogue and active ageing.

This eco system of ideas and organisational development in the nuclear centre of the social co-operative alows Raise It Now to have capacity to work with other partners from civil society, such as universities, public bodies, federations, foundations, business centers, entrepreneuship agencies, start-up organisations.

The principal and strategic partner of Raise It Now for local and international activities is Loures Municipality and the department of Youth, Culture and Sports, the Social Network and Employability Group co-ordinated by Loures City Council.

Alignment with Loures Municipality and José Saramago Públic Library initiatives:

Reading Networks (2007-2008)

Using web 2.0 technologies (forums within a blog) was an initiative aimed at promoting reading among young people and involved school, libraries and Municipal Youth Services.

Reading Through Sacavém (2009 – on going)
A small free access library located in a renovated square of the city of Sacavém (a post-industrial borough of Lisbon undergoing a major urban transformation) where a concrete public bench was specially designed to receive a modern bookshelf. It is divided into two sections: one dedicated to children & youngsters, and another section for adults. It is available to anyone who wants to sit down to read a book. This is a new concept of library bench at Loures Municipality.

I am going to the library (2012 – on going)
Using a mobile library in different elementary schools which are located across the municipality promoting reading through story telling.

JSPL networks (1998 – on going)
A network of public school libraries (initiated in 1998) managed by JSPL comprising 49 elementary and secondary schools located in major districts.
A network of 8 public libraries (initiated in 2004) managed by JSPL comprising NGOs, public local parishes, local churches and the National Refugee Centre of Bobadela. The main responsibilities of JSPL are to promote reading activities and strategy, training of staff, collections management and setting-up core common guidelines for both networks.

Training for Learning Circle Facilitators (2013 - on going)
To disseminate the results of the project and create multiplying effects Raise It Now and the team from Loures Municipality organised a training session for the facilitators of the learning circles in June 2013.

The target audience for the training were staff who belong to a strategic Employability Group, Social Network of Loures, municipal and community workers, teachers, social workers, trainers and facilitators. The main objective for the development of new skills set is to enhance the employment prospects in the region.

Raise It Now and a team from Loures Municipality are planning to offer more training opportunities to the new social agents in the local communities.

Alignment with local initiatives - Calarasi, Romania

Association for Education and Sustainable Development (AESD) **Calarasi, Romania**, was founded in 2007 having as a main goal to promote lifelong learning in society in order to facilitate the development of active citizenship, social cohesion and employment.
AESD is an educational centre whose main activities are the delivery of formal and informal adult education, building an organised system of consulting, information and training with a lifelong duration. The Association tries to be complementary to

the educational network that already exists and to offer more flexibility for the learning of adults. The organisation tries to give to marginalised adults access to learning and to bring people closer to the labour market.

By participating in the European projects, the organisation aims to raise the profile of the lifelong learning in the locality. The Association supports local authorities in promoting the concept of lifelong learning as the engine for local and regional regeneration.

Alignment with AESD organisational objectives

One of the main objectives of association is to promote the concept of lifelong learning as a mean of accelerating local and regional development and facilitating social and professional development. PALS project played an important role in contributing towards the mission of the organisation, promoting meaningful and constructive communication.

Alignment with Romanian National Strategy and priorities of the Ministry of Education

The current educational policy aims to promote quality, modern and flexible teaching, enhancing creativity, abandoning the rigid and non-democratic style in teacher-student relationship, team work and efficient communication. In order to achieve these objectives, the local school inspectorate proposes a better communication between schools and other stakeholders (including parents), delegation of responsibilities, joint decision making and partnership work.

Calarasi School Inspectorate defines its educational policy according to the national and European guidelines and aims to:

- implement reform programmes at school level

- offer assistance and support to children and their families;

- develop community relationships.

PALS project may offer a useful method for the inspectorate and schools to achieve its objectives, namely complementary education (education for health and healthy living, culture, civic, entrepreneurial, technological), prevention of social exclusion and marginalisation of vulnerable children, consolidation of the institutional capacities and empowerment of school staff to embrace the autonomy.

Chapter 2: Educational basis for Learning Circles

Introduction to the PALS conceptual model

PALS discussions led to the conclusion that no one theory would be determinative as applied to a Learning Circle structure. A broad conglomeration of principles extracted from a wide range of theories informed the planning and administration of the pilot Circles run by the project.

Traditional structural theory, for example, Kolb's Learning Cycle principles such as Reflective Learning (Donald Schon,1987) and the theory of Change Agents do not fit exactly with the Learning Circle structure. More recent principles such as connectivism and the difficulties identified in matching the right knowledge with the right people in the right context[10] to make learning effective are more directly applicable, but again, are not an exact match.

PALS took the consensus view that members of Learning Circles were primarily engaging in a change agent exercise within an informal learning structure. As the Circle progressed, individual members were fostering personal development whether through imparting or receiving knowledge or skills, for example, communicative ability. This process was sufficiently flexible to allow members to progress at their own individual rate and yet sufficiently formal such that the learning remained focussed on a central theme. This paradox or tension between the formal aspects of the learning process and the overt informal structure is an aspect of this model that does require active management.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model of a Learning Circle

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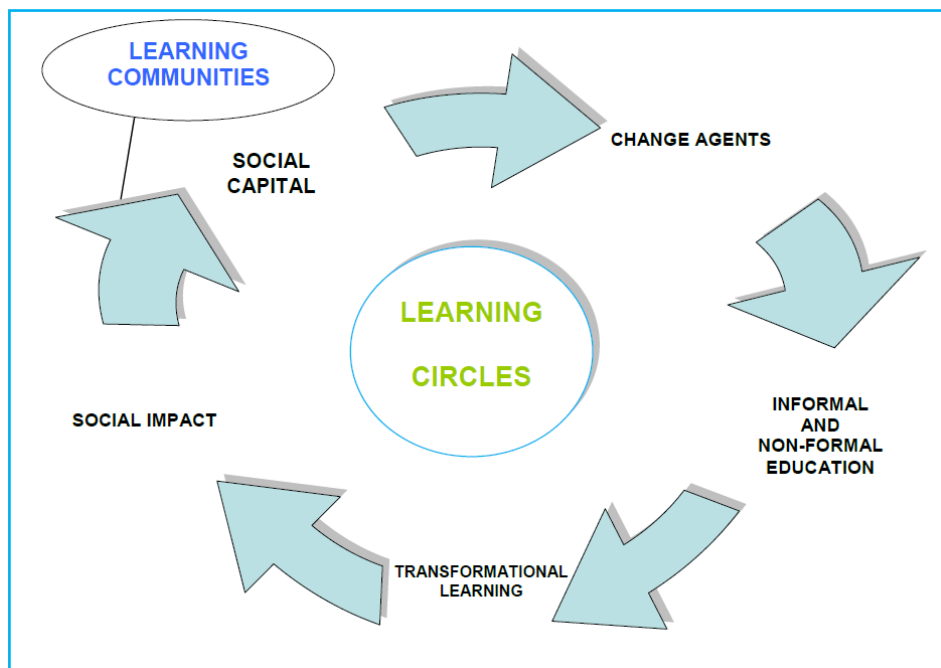
[10] Siemens G. (2004) Connectivism – A Learning Theory for the Digital Age.

Learning Communities

A Learning Circle can be a stand alone structure but the PALS concept anticipated that pilot Learning Circles would be set up within local Learning Communities. These pilots would be aligned with wider local government initiatives designed to promote education and the effective use of all local services extending to those for the very young and the very old.

The term Learning Community has become something of a common place. In the sphere of education, for example, the term has been used variously to mean extending classroom practice into the community; brining community personnel into schools to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students; or engaging students, teachers and administrators simultaneously in learning.
The function of the Learning Community within PALS is dealt with in greater depth in Chapter 5 below.

Figure 3: Learning Communities Model
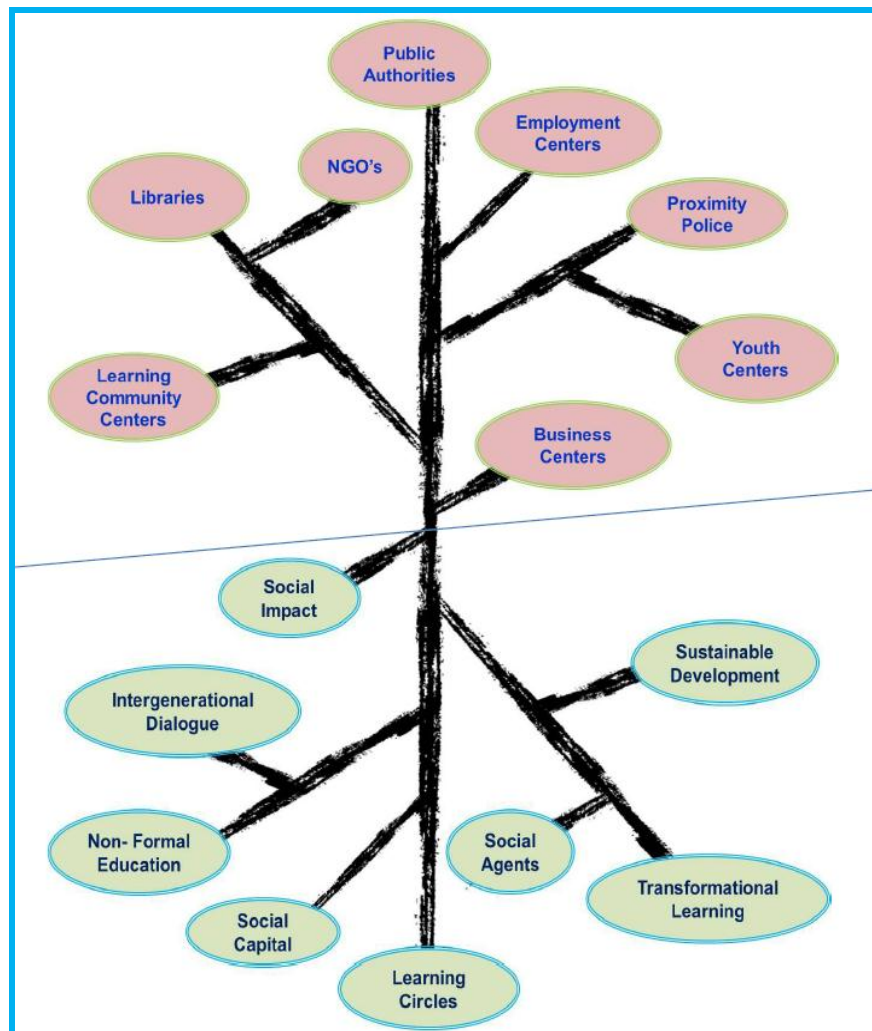
Explanation of Figure 3: Learning Communities Model

The two parts of the tree represent a model for delivering Learning Circles within a Community, transforming it into a Learning Community. The upper part of the tree represents the public/visible part of the Community, where all the social capital will be activated; here are represented some examples of the agents which can be activated to change. The lower part represents the roots or the invisible part of the tree, where some of main ideas underneath a Learning Circle coexist; all the issues crossing our mind while planning, preparing and running a Learning Circle.

Social Capital and Learning Circles

The concept of social capital is generally used to refer to the resources that people derive from their relationships with others. One of the main thesis of social capital theory is that relationships matter and can make a difference to communities and the central idea is that "social networks are a valuable asset".

Definitions of Social Capital

Acording to the World bank definition: "Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together."

- **Bourdieu:** 'Social capital is the 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1983: 249).

- **Coleman:** 'Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure' (Coleman 1994: 302).

- **Putnam**: 'Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue." The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital' (Putnam 2000: 19).

There are three basic types of social capital:

(a) **Bonding** – which denotes ties between people in similar situations such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours;

(b) **Bridging** – encompasses more distant ties such as loose friendships and work colleagues;

(c) **Linking** – ties to those outside of the community enabling members to access a wider range of resources.

PALS pilot Learning Circles provided a structure in which all three types of social capital can be exploited. Circle members are not limited to one community or drawn from one source and, therefore, members are likely to comprise social capital from both categories (a) and (b) and the operation of the Circle actively promotes linking ties to those outside the communities from which members are drawn.

Features of Social Capital
- Social energy
- Community spirit / good neighbourliness
- Social bonds
- Civic virtue/active citizenship
- Community networks
- Social resources
- Informal & formal networks

Outcomes of Social Capital
- Lower crime rates
- Better health and improved longevity
- Better educational achievement
- Greater income equality
- Enhanced economic achievement

Measuring Social Capital
- Participation, social engagement, commitment
- Control, self-efficacy
- Perception of community level structures or characteristics
- Social interaction, social networks, social support
- Trust, reciprocity, social cohesion

How access to social capital can benefit lifelong learning
- Mastering new technology
- Enhance (or damage) reputations of providers
- Influence trust in tutors/trainers
- Social bonds could shape general attitudes towards change (positive and negative)
- Affect the capacity of particular groups to survive external shocks.

Connection between social capital and lifelong learning has acquired great significance and prominence in EU education and training policy. The concept is also linked to competitiveness and development.

Chapter 3: Setting up a Learning Circle

Learning circles can be used for many different purposes, such as learning about the history of a population you serve, policies affecting the work and the life in community, or ideas about how to include social change activities in your daily practice.

Normally they are set up in a room, however it is also possible to adapt the principles of the Learning Circle into an outdoor space.

What are the general characteristics of Learning Circles?

- Small, diverse group (8-12 people)
- Meet regularly, for example, once a week over a period of weeks / months
- Set ground rules for a respectful, productive discussion
- Are usually led by a facilitator who is impartial but helps to manage the deliberation process
- Look at an issue from different points of view
- Act as a vehicle to discover, share and express knowledge
- Start where people are and encourages growth
- Involve a spiralling process of reflection and action

General Steps to Plan and Implement a Learning Circle:

- Before the first meeting
- Running the meetings
- Developing the Learning Circle
- Evaluation
- Dissemination of the product

Before the 1st meeting:

- The circle is usually formed following a topic that you prepared beforehand having in mind the issues that are affecting community or organisation.
- The topic
- The environment of the circle should be one that creates a safe space where either staff or participants may give voice to important issues and concerns. Building support for participation in the learning circle is critical as staff recognise that the learning circle is part of building capacity for social change around important community issues.

During the Sessions of the Learning Circle:
Some of the steps below only appear during the first session of the learning circle.

Opening of the circle: Participants must learn how to work together. Depending on the topic, sessions can start with a poem, sharing a personal object related to the theme of the circle.

Build the "group agreement": These are not rules to be followed in the strict sense but the collective agreement is important. This agreement must come from the group and not be imposed. It is actually asking "how do we work?" This agreement may be written on a flipchart and then clearly displayed on a wall, or table and should be visible at each session. Additions or changes are possible, if necessary or desired by the group.

Agree on the topic and learning goals: Normally topic has been previously selected. However, the group may want to decide together what will be the final product of the learning circle. This can be made using an action plan or being just a decision building in relationships of trust. This goal should ideally be achieved by the end of the learning circle (not necessarily at the end of the session). Nevertheless, the participants will have the feeling of moving forward, to progress in learning. This can be verified in the final assessment, or at the next session.

Defining roles: One of the characteristics of the learning circle is shared leadership. This is the stage where the roles are distributed if you have decided to rotate the role of facilitator or guardian of the group.

Ask questions and open the circle: Is the first turn to speak on the topic of the session. Circle members are encouraged to express their views on it. Typically, everyone is encouraged to express themselves using for example the talking stick.

Conversation open and general: Participants will discuss the topic but without the talking stick. This is not a real discussion because everyone has the opportunity to express themselves by saying what is important to him on the subject and someone can answer that. There is no cross chat (elements are not specifically bind to consistently). The task of the rest of the group is to listen. The facilitator has then a key role in making sure that each participant is immersed in the conversation (because that is where it is the exchange of knowledge and learning).

Final round: It is expected to reflect where individual and group learning process is at the end of each session. It is a personal reflection on the changes that participants can feel at the personal level of knowledge. It is also to express if the session was constructive for the purpose of final production set together at the first session. This tour can be organized with or without talking stick.

Reaching out to communities and selection of participants

There are many ways to select who will participate in a learning circle. Do what works best for your organisation, but make sure to include people whose job or community role rarely allows them time to participate in this type of reflection.

Tips to reaching out to communities:
- Define a communication and visibility strategy
- Use visibility materials like posters and flyers
- Use different kind of application forms: paper and on-line forms
- Use the real social network of your community and depending of your target group, if necessary go door to door, to distribute the flyers and the applications forms in the shops, pharmacies, seniors universities, youth centres, sports centres, museums, libraries.
- Bet personal contact and on mouth to mouth for recruitment and "lose" 2 or 3 minutes explaining what are you doing to strategic persons of the local community;
- Use mailing lists, Facebook, internet web pages and other on-line platforms;

Practicalities to remember:
- Contact details of participants
- Safety issues
- Recording the work of the Learning Circle helps members to focus
- Appoint a facilitator
- Facilitator's role in setting and implementing ground rules
- Organise visiting speakers
- Try to use the best you can internal resources of the Learning Circle
- Evaluation should be built into the meetings
- Use non-formal and informal education methods
- Things to set up in the beginning: Frequency of the sessions, duration of the learning circle, schedule, time and place.

Number of sessions: Before the first session you have to reflect how many sessions you think you will need to identify a community building strategy for at least one aspect of the community or organization. On the first session propose to the group a number of session and then agree and decide with the participants the final number. We suggest the minimum of six sessions and the maximum of 12 sessions.

Environment: The environment of the learning circle should be one that creates a safe space where either facilitator or participants may give voice to important issues and concerns. Building support for participation in the learning circle is

critical as staff recognize that the learning circle is part of building agency capacity to work for social change around important community issues.

Duration: The Learning Circle schedule is set by the group as a whole. It is created in the planning meeting and tells people when and where to come and what they should prepare.

Schedule: A schedule should be set up for a period of at least six but not more than ten to twelve meetings. This allows participants to plan their time effectively, but does not lock the Learning Circle into a rigid plan for the seemingly indefinite future**.**

Time and Place: In any learning circle, the group sets aside a designated time and place – whether weekly or monthly. This allows the participants to have time to think and reflect. Also helps to keep the social change on going.

Resources
To run a successful you don't need too many resources, you just to assure the basic conditions such as:
- Room with good conditions for the development of the Learning Circle where the participants can be seated in a circle
- Papers, pencils and collared pens
- Stickers
- Research and reading materials about the topic at least for the first two or three sessions
- Application forms, tracking progress model, evaluation form
- Posters and flyers for visibility and dissemination
- Talking stick
- Motivated and prepared facilitator with basic skills and knowledge of non-formal education methods
- Media support: computer, music, data show, movie or documentary

Outcomes or an end product
An important outcome that helps to create an add value to the learning circle is to have a shared product to presente in the end. This final product could be a public exhibition, a blogue, a printed document, a project report, or documentar. Nevertheless, successful learning circle can achieve another number of outcomes, including but not limited to the following:
- Action planning
- Affirmation of participants / views
- Answering a question
- Increasing self-motivation and self-esteem

- Building common ground
- Collaboration
- Decision-making
- Fun
- Goal setting
- Objective achievement
- Problem-solving
- Recommendations
- Relationship
- Exchange of good practices

Facilitation of Learning Circles:

What is Facilitation?

Facilitation is the art of leading people through processes toward agreed-upon outcomes in ways that elicit participation, ownership and creativity from all persons involved. In simple terms, it includes those skills and practices involved in leading a group. In more complex terms, it includes all the strategies used to support collaboration and organisational change.

Facilitation is a non-formal education process that uses a range of skills and methods to bring the best out of people as they work to achieve a result.

The role of the facilitator

A facilitator is someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them with planning to achieve without taking a particular role in the discussion. As a facilitator of a learning circle, the main role is to help the group clarify what it wants to focus on and then to help keep discussion productive. An important part of the philosophy of a learning circle is that everyone learns from each other and everyone has something to contribute. To achieve this the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility.

The Facilitator of a Learning Circle...

- Does not evaluate ideas
- Helps the group focus on a task
- Help people connect with the issues being discussed
- Suggests methods and procedures
- Protects all members of the group from attack
- Does not allow others to interrupt while someone else is speaking

- Encourages cooperation within the group
- Helps find win/win solutions
- Ensures everyone has the opportunity to participate
- Uses questions to encourage discussion
- Periodically summarizes the group consensus on issues to validate and clarify the progress of the discussion
- Ensures there is a 'closure' to each meeting
- Clarifies tasks to be completed between the meetings

Figure 4: Roles of a Facilitator Model

Partner
- Create Working partnership with client
- Design & Customize program to meet client needs
- Manage multi session efforts effectively

Guide
- Guide group with clear models and processes
- Facilitate Group Self-Awareness about its Task
- Guide the Group to Consensus and desired Outcomes

Planner
- Select Clear methods and processes
- Prepare time and space to support group processes

Taskmaster
- Manage Time
- Keep Group Focused and on Task
- Manage Group Conflict

Enabler
- Create and Sustain a Participartory Environment
- Honor and Recognize diversity ensuring inclusiveness

Motivator
- Trust group Potential and Model Neutrality
- Acknowledge input and ideas

http://usfacilitators.com/cgi-bin/p/awtp-product.cgi?d=us-facilitators&item=17721

Effective facilitator must be well organised and prepared to invest some time in thinking about the needs of the group. Facilitator should be able to coordinate some practical aspects of running the learning circles, e.g. arrange photocopies, water, paper, pens, digital and media support. As a facilitator, you will play an important role in helping the group work well together, for example, by setting a positive tone and letting others have their say before expressing your own opinion.

Responsibilities of a Facilitator

Some of the key responsibilities of a facilitator include the following:

- Help the group clarify its goals or desired outcomes;
- Help the group members use accomplish its goals or objectives;
- Help the group to change direction and redefine its goals and desired outcomes;

Facilitation Challenges

- Staying focused and commitment to the group;
- Managing ambiguity and information overload;
- Dealing with misperceptions and emotional reactions of the circle members;
- Helping the group develop so that the participant can ultimately work without facilitation;

Ground rules

It is important to set ground rules as a group to gain buy-in and ownership from all members. Therefore, at the first meeting the facilitator should ask everyone to participate in agreeing the ground rules. The facilitator along with the group members should be able to remind others about the ground rules as and when required.

The following are simply some examples of ground rules.

- Members should arrive on time;
- Meeting should end on time;
- Group members will make decisions together;
- Everyone must be given an opportunity to participate;
- No one should dominate a discussion;
- If you disagree, remain respectful and accept that people might have differing opinions;
- Members should be given the opportunity to speak without being interrupted;
- Value and encourage different opinions and viewpoints;
- Mobile phones must be turned off during meetings;

Legal aspects that you should consider

- Insurance of the building and the risk assessment of the premises;
- Copyright issues;
- Seeking consent to use images, videos and other recorded material;
- Author rights for the outcomes of the Learning Circle
- Confidentiality and Data Protection;
- Building security;
- Fire exits and evacuation procedures

What should ground rules cover?
- Commitment to attending and active participation
- Trust and respect
- Open and flexible approach to thinking
- Individual responsibility
- Group reciprocity

Health & safety and safeguarding

Identify a set of essential features that should be incorporated in a learning circle. Present your findings as a spider diagram like the one below to help clarify important aspects of the learning circle and incorporate these in ground rules for the group. Physical safety should be considered when picking the venue for the learning circles.

Figure 5 – Safety and safeguarding diagram

Chapter 4: Running a Learning Circle

Introduction

There are few factors that need to be taken into account to ensure successful running of a Learning Circle (LC). This chapter will provide some guidance and suggestions on various aspects of running learning circles including tracking progress, motivation, the role of the facilitator, inclusive learning environment and critical success factors.

Tracking progress

Tracking progress is crucial to keeping the motivation levels high amongst the participants. Once the objectives of the learning circle are made clear, it is important that track the progress towards achieving these. This can take a form of a learning log, learning circle's diary or more informal strategies and techniques depending on the topic. Participants need to be working towards a joint product, which will be created as a result of the learning circle.

Recommendations:

- Have a record of what has been achieved during the LC sessions;
- Collect feedback at the end of each session to determine whether the needs of the group are being met and use to inform future sessions;
- Focus on the objectives and the product;
- Use an informal evaluation to monitor progress of the LC;

Keeping the learning circle motivated

Keeping the learning circle motivated is important and the motivation will largely depend on the topic and product chosen, the facilitator(s), the relationship between members and with the facilitator(s), levels of satisfaction and the acquisition of any new skills and knowledge by the participants.

Tips for facilitator(s):

- Ensure all participants have an opportunity to contribute;
- Suggest new ideas/view points;
- Allocate tasks for the participants, promote research on topics;
- Encourage discussion (new questions, to invite guest speakers, bring documentation etc);
- Share the responsibility (have more than one facilitator);
- Value contributions made by all members;

-   Create visual support (pictures, handbooks, etc) in order to make it more specific;
-   Facilitate social capital / to make links with other communities;
-   Work on agreed topics that relate to the personal interests of all members;
-   Seek agreement with members on the common product
-   Ensure all participants develop new skills

Maintaining an inclusive learning environment

This aspect is particularly important when you work with adults who may not have been in learning for a long time and who may have bad learning experiences.

-   Be aware of any special needs participants may have;
-   Ensure all participants have a positive experience;
-   Ensure all participants have a chance to contribute;
-   Facilitate good relationships between all participants.

Critical success factors

-   Take cultural aspects into the account, e.g. Somali women in the UK pilot
-   Flexibility;
-   Effective management of group dynamics;
-   Let participants make decisions;
-   Anticipate conflicts and deal with them with sensitivity;
-   Tact and diplomacy;
-   Facilitate, do not teach;
-   Ensure all are participating and listening to each other;
-   If you have an existing group, aim to develop the group further to improve practice (e.g. France).

Chapter 5: Evaluating and measuring impact

Evaluating the Learning Circle

The project recognised the importance of evaluation and that the measurement of impact with Learning Circles is not easy. There are some immediately apparent hurdles, for example:

- there are no formal learning goals or outputs;
- there is no common starting line or place;
- there is no common standard against which learning can be formally measured;
- the group evolves and in so doing the learning process changes;
- the group has its own changing dynamics which interact with those of individual members;
- the absence of formal records tends to inhibit a formal evaluative process;

The role of the facilitator is pivotal. At the beginning when the Circle is set up the facilitator undertook an assessment of individual members, essentially informal and oral reflecting the flat informal structure of the Circle, looking (so far as was consistent with these principles) at their:

- Existing level of communicative ability
- Current levels of confidence and assertiveness
- Willingness to play an active part in the Circle's activities
- Capacity to attend the full number of sessions over the projected term.

The facilitator should also complete a Group Profile to determine the extent to which members possess and existing skill set, their motivation for joining the Circle, their existing levels of communicative ability to participate as active listeners and members of the Circle.

The fundamental principle, is, however, that Circle members should be encouraged and nurtured to self-assess and recognise at the conclusion of the Circle activities the extent of the learning journey that they have managed to achieve.

At the end of each Circle session the facilitator would promote and stimulate members to self-assess and reflect on the knowledge they had acquired over the session. This would inform a consensus for the likely topic for the next session and provide opportunities for members to volunteer that they would undertake learning/research outside the Circle meeting. This would be an important achievement for evaluation purposes that is the nurturing of members' study skills and their aspiration to improve their knowledge base.

The evaluative process would normally involve a short discussion at the end of each session inviting members to indicate very briefly in their own words what benefit they think they have received from the meeting and, perhaps, if they feel sufficiently strongly what they would like to change or try and achieve next time.

There are individuals who will not necessarily have the skills or knowledge base to consciously self-assess. It will be a part of the facilitator's role to provide those individuals with at least some skill base from which they can start a self evaluative process. This would normally be through an informal oral discussion with those individuals asking them to concentrate on the learning that they feel they have acquired and on anything they either can do or know that they could not do or did not know before taking part in the Circle session. With these members it is important that these exercises are undertaken at each session and not left to some form of cumulative session at the end of the Circle term.

Evaluation in this content is generally more focussed on soft skills as opposed to hard learning objectives but this is context dependent. For example, if a Circle has a particular objective, such as a local problem of conduct, for example, fly-tipping, and to effect a real change then a hard objective evaluation becomes possible.

The facilitator should endeavour to keep a record of these ends of session discussions to inform the final evaluation undertaken at the end of the Circle term. A particular feature is that in the pilot Circles run by the project, facilitators found that they needed to create individually tailored evaluative formats some examples of which appear in the Appendix.

After considerable discussion PALS partners agreed that the issues that should be evaluated with members at the end of the term should extend to at least the following core issues:

Whether the member had contributed to the topic or theme?
Did the member feel that sufficient time was allowed?
Did the member feel that the pace of discussions was appropriate?
Was the venue suitable?
Did the member feel that the Learning Circle structure was helpful and effective as a learning environment?
Did the member feel that they had acquired new knowledge?
Did the member feel that his/her communicative skills had improved?
Did the member feel more confident in speaking in a public forum?
Had the member made new friends?
Had the member formed the aspiration to attend another Learning Circle in the future?
Did the member feel that there was an opportunity to bring about some significant change in their lifestyle or condition?

The means for capturing the feedback from members had to allow for the fact that some members were not confident about their written skills and were only really comfortable responding to oral questions.

Change chart

An important tool for measuring impact is the individual change chart that all members are encouraged to complete to record any progress, improvement or

change in attitude. It is owned by individual members, is completed in their native language if they wish and is the opportunity for members to reflect on the progress they are making. It is an invaluable tool in helping to focus members' attention on the learning process and on the progress development as the Circle sessions continue.

Impact

PALS partners wanted to identify the most significant qualitative outcomes that the project would expect to achieve within the project term (i.e. what change has it brought about)?

Examples of the changes in behaviour that the project would expect to promote in participants would include:

- changes in understanding and behaviour, e.g. supported by evidence from stakeholders, facilitators, and Circle members;
- changes in organisational culture and awareness and a greater willingness to integrate within wider communities.

The project anticipated that there would be wide ranging qualitative benefits that can be conveniently categorised under a number of headings:

Citizenship
- An increased and proactive attitude to community welfare;
- Members took part in a community activity that they would otherwise not have contemplated;
- Members formed new peer relationships with individuals outside their own communities.

Economic benefits
- More effective use of financial resources (cutting waste);

Personal Development
- The promotion of increased social cohesion;
- Improved feelings of self-worth and esteem;
- Improved personal communication skills;
- Augmented self-value and assertiveness;

Familial benefits
- Cascading benefits to children and family members;

Diversity
- The opportunity to learn and benefit at first hand from the experiences and beliefs of other cultures.

The interaction from the very wide range of age and experience represented across the spectrum of participants was encapsulated in the presentations by Circle facilitators to project administrators. The feedback and sharing of peer

experience with European colleagues was an enriching experience for all who took part in the project.

Table 1 - Social Capital Measurement Framework

Social Capital Measurement Framework	
Dimension	**Indicators**
Social participation	• Number of cultural, leisure, social groups belonged to and frequency and intensity of involvement • Volunteering, frequency and intensity of involvement • Religious activity
Civic participation	• Perceptions of ability to influence events • How well informed about local/national affairs • Contact with public officials or political representatives • Involvement with local action groups • Propensity to vote
Social networks and social support	• Frequency of seeing/speaking to relatives /friends/neighbours • Extent of virtual networks and frequency of contact • Number of close friends/relatives who Live nearby • Exchange of help • Perceived control and satisfaction with life
Reciprocity and trust	• Trust in other people who are like you • Trust in other people who are not like you • Confidence in institutions at different levels • Doing favours and vice versa Perception of shared values
Views of the local area	• Views on physical environment • Facilities in the area • Enjoyment of living in the area • Fear of crime

Chapter 6: Pilots/Case studies

Introduction to the pilots

The pilot Learning Circles were the culmination of the work carried out by partners to investigate the use and application of the model as an effective learning tool. Initially it had been envisaged that the model would be directed towards the attraction and retention of marginalised members of society. In the event the application of the pilots demonstrated that it was of equal value for both vulnerable learners and specific groups or to address a specific task or need. These latter examples were not limited to otherwise excluded learners.

Although there was a suggested central general format or structure which had been agreed in the earlier training, each partner had a wide discretion about how, in practice, their particular Learning Circles would operate. In the event, there was a very wide and varied spectrum of applications ranging from parent groups through to attendees in Romania on a Volunteers Week with a commensurately wide range of learning topics and themes.

There was considerable trepidation among partners and their staff about the perceived potential difficulties that could arise with expressions of concern about health and safety issues through to the possibility of serious arguments developing among the Circle participants. In the event, none of these issues or concerns arose and, to the slight relief of partners, the pilots ran very smoothly with no critical incidents at all.

A very strong message was received from all partners that despite the range and variety of application in the pilot Circles the feedback concerning the utility and use of the model was extremely positive and this point is explored in the following section 'Key Findings'. There is always a question mark about the validity of any larger scale projection or expansion from pilot tests or exercises and one obvious issue with this informal or non-formal learning structure is the absence of any formal monitoring of quality and the absence of accreditation or test results. This aspect is, however, an inescapable reflection of non-formal learning and a clear reflection of the fact that that certainty of mainstream measurable attainment has been sacrificed for the much larger benefit of reaching learners otherwise excluded from learning. Also the Circle concurrently enabled peer to peer dialogue in a nurturing environment that would otherwise simply not occur.

Key findings from the pilots

There were three UK pilots and details of two reports from the Learning Circles appear as appendices to this report. They were all quite different in make up and operation with widely varying themes:
- Education in the UK.
- Social media;
- Recycling and reusing waste.

The first was formed from a group of Somali women who were refugees and who, without exception, had one or more young children. There were a number of immediately apparent attributes arising from this uniformity of participant characteristic that proved to be of recurring significance and importance:

(a)   There was a shared common language in which each participant was fluent (Somali).
(b)   Each participant had a commonality of life experience in Somalia;
(c)   Critically each participant had a recent vivid shred experience of arriving in the UK as a refugee with limited or no resources;
(d)   All participants had been dependent to varying degrees in the UK on the pre-existing support structures such as cultural and ethnic associations;
(e)   It transpired that each participant was experiencing very similar problems with the educational process of their children.

Across the board it proved essential that from the outset there was a common language. The essential working of the Circles required a facility of expression and an appreciation of nuance for the Circle to achieve its maximum potential. In fact an absence of shared cultural experiences could be as much a strength as a disadvantage and was a source of an enriching diversity in the discussion and interaction of some Circle meetings. This particular Circle found that the participants had shared poor experiences with a local school and were enabled to meet with local officials and initiate a remedial strategy. This was an excellent example of a concrete outcome identified and driven by the members themselves.

The second UK Circle was entirely different and focussed on exploring with members improved learning about social media skills. Particular points that arose from this pilot:

(a) The role of the facilitator was critical to the smooth running of the Circle
(b) The facilitator has to avoid simply giving participants answers to issues or questions that the Circle is considering particularly where the facilitator has expert knowledge
(c) There is no one model of Learning Circle. It is a flat non-hierarchical structure and there are some disadvantages in that it is not structured to necessarily achieve formal learning outcomes.

The Circles run at Bordeaux and in Loures were both of an entirely different complexion. Both Circles explored literature, reading and poetry and these themes naturally lend themselves to more exploratory and discursive meetings with wide ranging agenda. Both courses were run in local library facilities regarded as a safe neutral environment usually readily accessible for participants with good public transport links.

Both groups enjoyed particularly positive meetings in which participants expressed a clear respect for each other and for any divergence of view and in which the percipients all said that they had not only enjoyed the experience but had acquired knowledge and had the opportunity to make new friends. This social aspect of the

pilot Circles was identified by participants as important and not merely a minor feature. It was very significant in encouraging members to continue meetings after the end of the formal plot exercise.

In Bordeaux participants with the support of the facilitator set up and maintained a blog. There were difficulties in that at one point the blog disappeared and a recurring these was the difficulty in finding the time necessary for updates. Some members found the blog difficult to access. In principle, however, this was available aspect of the pilot and one that participants actively promoted. It has an obvious facility as a legacy of the Circle.

In Loures, "The summer of my childhood" Learning Circle was designed to develop a culture of learning among adults (especially elderly people) with low literacy skills. It became a transformational learning process through which participants felt more empowered to make a proper use of the public library as a community living room, especially those who were quite sceptical in the beginning.

Romania ran two Learning Circles, again, with considerable success. Both Circles were run during a Volunteers Week. The original proposal was changed and the actual pilot involved younger people from local schools and their teachers interacting with the older generation from residential care centres. The duration of the pilots was shorter than anticipated but more intense.

This was an opportunity for the younger people that they would not otherwise have had to learn about the experiences and cultural knowledge of the older generation and to learn about how active citizenship can contribute to the welfare of the entire community. The pilot enabled a two way learning process. The older generation expressed not only their enjoyment of opportunities that they simply would not otherwise had had to meet and learn from the young people and to impart their life experiences to help and guide the youngsters.

This was an excellent example of how important learning can take place outside a formal learning structure and all the participants recognised that the Learning Circle model provided a supportive environment and an opportunity that would not otherwise have occurred.

A second pilot addressed the theme of parent/teenager communication. Parents particularly had raised the difficulties they felt occurred in trying to communicate boundaries. The goals for parents were;

To achieve better communication with their teenager children
Increased involvement of the children in intellectual activities
To reduce the hours spent on the computer by the children
To enable at least an extra hour of discussion with their children

The participants found that the Circle provided a very effective forum for shared experiences from the perspective of both parents and teenagers. It was important that all participants realised that the experiences were in many respects common to families and not unique. The Circle in fact operated as a tool for greater social

cohesion and integration. It allowed an opportunity and a medium for greatly improved communication and the expression of concerns and issues that clearly affected a wide sections of the community. The teenagers would certainly not have had any other opportunity or means to collectively express their views and feelings.

The Romanian Circles were perhaps the most structured of all the pilots undertaken and they had the most extensive ground rules for the conduct of participants. This particular pilot Circle may reflect a more homogeneous culture in the local community whereas those in the UK, for example, in the UK involved a widely diverse community draw from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

For example, in Loures we perceive libraries have the resources and means to act directly in the processes of social inclusion. Considering the community from their viewpoint, not from the point of view of the normal public or usual library goers. Going in search of people (and their needs) outside the library physical walls: going in the park, the morning market, inside pharmacies or the local Job Centre, Making use of institutional websites and social networks (such as Facebook).

In Loures, we sought to identify a problem and opened a new space. We thought a very precisely in a quite specific public: people with low educational level, not professionally employed, retired or unemployed, very concretely, ladies which retired and alone. We took the memoirs of authors which wrote in Portuguese from the 20th century - including diaries, memoirs, novels, poems - authors such as Miguel Torga, Saramago, Lobo Antunes, Ilse Llosa, Graciliano, Ondjaki (among others) . We went to the everyday childhood themes: family, school, games, readings, toys...
One main goal was to use reading outside the school context and associate it with leisure time, sharing memories and experiences, all together readers and non-readers (using and sharing photos, stories, texts, toys, personal items and family albums).

One of the intended goals for the Learning circle participants was to use the author's biographic notes and summon memories of their own, sometimes both were so similar... This space within the José Saramago Public Library was a welcoming room with a good environment, nice vibe and where people feel good.

Apart from opening and conversational attitude that allowed us to continuously collect the opinions of the participants, the final evaluation survey allowed us to conclude the immense enthusiasm of the people who participated in "The Summer of My Childhood" Learning Circle.
We conclude this happy experience that learning circles are indeed a powerful tool for learning and non-formal education with great potential for application to cultural systems such as libraries and museums.

APPENDIX 1: CASE STUDIES

Enfield Community Learning Service
PALS Project Case Study

Main Organisation	London Borough of Enfield
Learning Circle Title	**Social Media Learning Circle**

Delivery Organisation	Future Trend
Location	Bush Hill Park Library, London Borough of Enfield, UK

Background? (Please set out details on the circumstances in which the Learning Circle was set up and what you hoped to achieve).
Publicity & identifying a need Adult Learners' Week in the United Kingdom is a week during which courses of all types are advertised and marketed promoting lifelong learning. Future Trend ran some bite- size taster workshops as a part of this activity inviting new people for an hour or so to try out introductory sessions. The response was positive and many people expressed an active interest in participating in this type of learning. Having identified the need for the learning and the willingness of a sample to participate Future Trend ran a series of learning circles over a 6 week period free of charge exploring the theme of social media. Marketing included posters and leaflets in local libraries through the London Borough of Enfield. The opportunity was also promoted together with other ICT courses and learning opportunities provided as part of mainstream adult learning initiatives.
Group profile
All the participants had some understanding of the meaning and nature of social media. There were eleven participants ranging in age between 27 and 60. There was a broadly even mix of genders and ethnicity ranged from members of the indigenous population through to members of minority ethnic groups.   All participants were able to communicate effectively in English as the language used by the learning circle. No data was collected on the educative attainment of individual participants or work types as it was felt that questions on these subjects might tend to create a hierarchy or produce counter productive feelings of a perceived inappropriate status within the learning circle.

How did the Learning Circle work in practice?

The principal facilitator did not issue any form of agenda or prescribed learning outcomes. The group were encouraged to set their own agenda. Participants were in the main driven by the wish to be familial with ICT activity being undertaken as a matter of course by their children and grandchildren. They wished to avoid exclusion from familiarity with their children's' activities.

Weekly topics included social net-working, Facebook and in particular security issues, Twitter and Linked-in and Myspace. Security was considered a big issue that occupied the entirely of one weekly session. Motivation was largely driven by a desire to ensure that participants were enabled to keep pace with their children's abilities to use and exploit social media and to begin to understand all the implications of the technology.

The learning circle met once per week over a 6 week period. Each week participants were asked to volunteer to act as the facilitator for the next session. The principal facilitator running the circle found that although members had some knowledge of ICT there was a tendency for the circle to look to him for answers particularly on technical issues, as opposed to working out matters between themselves as members of the circle.

Participants generally worked well together and found that several friendships began to form. The atmosphere was positive an inducive to learning. By the end of the 6 weeks all members had created Facebook accounts and had considerably increased confidence in their knowledge of what could and could not be achieved through the use of social media. This was considered as a very successful outcome for the learning circle activity.

Developing the learning circle and keeping it fresh

Rotating the role of facilitator helped to maintain interest and variety if administration of the group. It provided an opportunity for individuals to take ownership, build individual confidence and exercise and develop communication skills.

Informal adult learning from other adults' experiences is a key strategy in the operation of a successful learning circle.

The first week was critical in setting the tone, agreeing topics, and stating the ground rules for positive interchange and respect between members. It was very important to be aware of developing group dynamics and work to avoid excessive confrontation or the emergence of too dominant personalities. This meant it was necessary to encourage and promote the more reticent group members to take an active role and not allow themselves to become marginalised. This in turn required constant monitoring and delicate action from the facilitator. One strategy was to engage these individuals in one to one conversations during the breaks and then encourage them to develop the points discussed within the circle.

Establishing and raising areas of mutual interest such as concerns about children and subjects such as bullying, similar to those in self-help groups, was an effective management tool to promote circle cohesion.

Were there any parts of the learning circle or its operation that gave rise to difficulties?
The initial tendency of members to rely upon the principal facilitator as a teacher rather than a facilitator for their own learning procedures. This was problem for both members and the facilitator was each party was more sued to a formal learning structure such as a class room
On feature which proved a particular challenge for the facilitator was when members relied upon information from one member which he knew to be wrong. He had to encourage members to explore ramifications of such information which would then reveal the original incorrect statement rather than act to simply correct the problem.
Keeping the members focussed and on track proved a challenge and the group showed a tendency to deviate from the theme or were easily distracted.

What aspects of the learning circle worked particularly well?
Attendance was consistent and regular. Members clearly felt that they benefited from the learning circle and communication with other participants. The shared experience and knowledge of the group was acknowledged by members as a source of inspiration and strength.
Common areas of concern or inertest helped to build relationships between members and the developing trust then in turn engendered confidence.
Members who began to deploy new found skills in the familial or home environments and found that they were able to understand and be aware of topics and technical procedures that they had previously found incomprehensible were able to share the sense of achievement within the circle. This sense of achievement helped all members to feel that the circle activity was a genuine positive learning experience.

Critical success factors
- Professionally qualified facilitator with developed management skills   - Getting everyone involved – ensuring that participants were actively engaged   - Ensuring regular attendance by members   - All members were able to communicate in a common language in this case English.

What was the impact of the learning circle?
The impact of this learning circle was wide ranging. Since it is a feature of the learning circle that it does not mandate hard learning outcomes the impact has been measured through a range of factors.
Increased confidence
Circle members expressed the fact that they had measurable gain in confidence both in terms of their social functioning, willingness and ability to go outside their immediate cultural and family circles and in expression of their views.

Increased knowledge of social media

Members said that their knowledge and perception of social media has been dramatically improved. They no longer fear the technology but have a considerable respect for its potential both positive and negative. They generally expressed the view that the knowledge they had gained was essential for the effective functioning of their role within the family.

Improved Peer communication skills

All of the circle members expressed a readiness to engage in discussions and to put forward a point of view. This aspect of the learning process was affected by cultural and gender preconceptions about role and was in some respects constrained by necessary cultural sensitivity. All members felt, however, that they had gained presentational skills and through the exercise of active debate within the circle learned through their application.

Increased social network resources

The contacts made between members had given most of them a social resource that they would not otherwise have been able to access and had the potential for experiences and access to resources that some members would never otherwise have enjoyed.

Improved family role functioning

The combination of improved social media knowledge, advanced social discourse skills and the inculcation of confidence resulted in members being able to exercise a more effective, structured, and nuanced role within the familial setting. More effective communication, even indeed surprising offspring with the extent of their technical knowledge was an experience that members particularly found as a lasting reward.

Promoting the aspiration for further learning

Members have stated that they do not wish to cease or lose the learning experiences that they have enjoyed through the learning circle. The acquisition of these skills has improved and reinforced the capacity of circle members to obtain employment and engendered a structure for personal improvement which is expected to continue as an ongoing theme.

"This course has been a great opportunity for building confidence. All of the participants have set up Facebook accounts and said that they would like to take the course up a level and have the learning circle as an online forum."
Martin Pye (Futuretrend) 8th August 2012

Enfield Community Learning Service
PALS Project Case Study

Main Organisation	London Borough of Enfield
Learning Circle Title	**Education in the UK**

Delivery Organisation	**Samafal**
Location	Samafal Somali Women

Background? (Please set out details on the circumstances in which the Learning Circle was set up and what you hoped to achieve).

The sponsoring organisation Samafal was set up to help and support Somali women refugees in the UK. The learning circle was initially set up with the aim of giving the women a forum to identify and explore the issues that were of the most concern for them and possible routes to access resources and help with meeting the challenges they faced.

No marketing scheme was required as the group members had initiated contact with Samafal but a poster was displayed in the delivery centre with the time and venue and an indication of some likely topics. Initially there was no set agenda or theme save that areas such as housing, immigration, education and health would be considered

At the very first meeting the members, all of whom were female, wanted to urgently discuss education. A common issue of concern was the move of children from primary to secondary school and how the education system operated.

Group profile

All the members were female, were mothers with young school age children, their ages ranged between 20 and 50 and all resided within the London Borough of Enfield. All members had been resident in the United Kingdom for between 2 and 10 years and had the common Somali language. In addition each had some spoken English although the level of attainment varied considerably.

The group were far more comfortable using their mother tongue which allowed all members to speak with equal facility.

All of the members were accustomed as a cultural imperative to meeting separately from men and the majority of the members had had some basic schooling in Somalia and valued the importance of education.

How did the Learning Circle work in practice?

There were befits from the fact that this was a single gender group and the fact of a homogeneous culture together with the fact the facilitator was herself a native of Somalia. None of the members felt inhibited and no individual member exhibited any lack of contribution to the circle.

The women quickly relaxed in each others company and related to the native Somali facilitator. Members became quite heated and expressed strong views on education. It was revealed in due course that eight of the nine women were using private tuition for their children to support their learning as they felt it was essential that their children should not fail in education. Many expressed the view that the system did not operate effectively to refer children with behaviour problems to sources of professional help.

In the first session members were asked to complete a questionnaire seeking to establish what views or experiences members had of the English education system and of issues or concerns that they currently felt were important.   The results indicated that members did not understand the system, that they had all experience problems enrolling their children and that they were either unable or had great difficulty in accessing help and support with their children's education.

The group ran for four sessions over as many weeks. Each week a different external facilitator was allocated to the group. In the second week a British ESOL teacher was allocated to the group and feedback from the members indicated that she had not acted as an effective facilitator for a combination of reasons. One principal issue was that she did not speak Somali which was the chief language of the group, and members felt that she was unable to fully empathise with concerns such as, for example, a perception of racism.

The Circle was structured so that each week there was an agenda with express topics chosen by members for consideration such as bullying, behaviour management, and racism.

At the end of the four week period all members expressed the view that it was the opportunity of a forum in which they could formulate their experiences and explore possible solutions to problems that they found invaluable.

Developing the learning circle and keeping it fresh

The device of the formal appointment of a different external facilitator for each separate week of the Circle operation had been intended to ensure that fresh impetus was given to the circle for each week of its operation. In the event, even the use of professionally qualified personnel did not provide such a stimulus. The language barrier proved a fundamental objection to the efficient operation of the facilitator role in at least one instance. However, the different personally provided a new and sometimes stimulating input.

Members expressed the view that they would have liked a single individual with whom they could become comfortable as the sessions progressed and the frequent changes mane that time and effort was lost as each facilitator had to build

a relationship with all members for each meeting. This resulted in a substantial dissipation of time and effort and a diversion of resources for the circle's operation.

The use of a more structured plan with express topics for each weekly session allowed a planned succession of relevant topics, ensured members could prepare for sessions in advance which promoted more advanced discussions.

Were there any parts of the learning circle or its operation that gave rise to difficulties?

The inability of the facilitator in week 2 to speak Somali limited her function and role.

A succession of different facilitators on balance while providing fresh stimuli had disadvantages in loss of continuity and a dissipation of resources in establishing relationships with members at each session.

It was felt better to train non teaching staff as teaching staff cannot ignore their experience and training and found it far more difficult not to act as teacher and instruct the members as opposed to the facilitation role.

Some discussion and interaction between group members became heated partially because members felt so strongly about issues and the facilitator did not always have the answers to issues and questions that were raised by members.

Members felt that a lack of end outcomes or objectives resulted in their feeling that's sessions were unstructured. Members were used to a forma learning system and had to learn to benefit from the community non-hierarchical structure that the circle provided.

What aspects of the learning circle worked particularly well?

The common cultural inheritance and shared gender of members meant that there were no adverse cultural inhibitions and that all members were confident in their facility of communication from the outset which resulted in very efficient circle operation.

The Circle has helped to identify needs within the local Somali community that had escaped the radar of local service provision.

Member for perhaps the first time have had access to a forum in which they can actually have some input, further that input is in a culturally and linguistic environment where they can express themselves freely and finally one in which they can see some positive results. For many members this was the first time they had had what was a liberating experience in terms of seeing some direct line of sight results from issues they have raised.

Evaluation

A questionnaire was completed by members before the circle and after the completion of the four sessions. The answers revealed that:

Members felt the experience had been useful and rewarding;

Valuable information was identified about real concerns about the operation of the educative system and their inability to access help and resources to address issues of concern;

That they had experienced a substantial increase in confidence and had formed peer relationships that were self-reinforcing and which would assist in dealing with education authorities;

The use of different facilitators or each session was on balance counterproductive;

The requirement for a common language medium was of the highest priority.

Critical success factors

Supported structure;

In this case a restriction to a single gender which reflected strong cultural imperatives;

A common cultural inheritance for all members;

A theme which engendered strong personal inertest for all members and directly affected the practical lives of their children.

What was the impact of the learning circle?

The sponsoring organisation has as a direct result of this experience has set up liaison groups with the local authority Parent engagement panel and the local Parents Centre EPC. This is likely to materially improve liaison with education authorities and cultural groups.

Improvements in the referral systems, help and resources for the Somali community and improved interpreter services to dramatically improve the communication between school and education providers and Somali parents.

Circle members actively want to progress the opportunity they have experienced.

"I never knew that these Somali women felt so strongly about their children's education to the point where they are paying personal tutors to improve their children's education"
Kaltun Abdillahi (Samafal)
8th August 2012

PALS Project Case Study
France, Les Aubiers Library (Bordeuax)

Main Organisation	Library of "les Aubiers" (neighbourhood of Bordeaux)
Learning Circle Title	Reading Committee

Delivery Organisation	Library of les Aubiers (Municipality of Bordeaux)
Location	Bordeaux (France)

Background

Les Aubiers is a district of Bordeaux City, inaugurated in 1971.

2006 :
3566 people: **49,7%** men, **50,3%** women.
41,7% were less than 20 years old and **6,3%** were seniors (more than 60 years old).
90% of inhabitants (3201) were receiving child benefit.
2007 :
90% of the active population were made of employees or workers.
2009 :
41.8% of the population were living with less than the guaranteed minimum wage, in social and economic deprivation.

This district is qualified as a priority sector.

The aim of the library is to implement the learning circle in a group that already exists, i.e. the reading committee of Les Aubiers library.

Group profile

The group comprised of 8 people.

- Age - between 38 and 76 years old;

- Gender - 7 females / 1 male;

- Education - very different profiles regarding the level of education (from BEPC to Master's degree);

- Employment status – mixture of unemployed and employed;

- Motivation - pleasure of reading. Most participants are involved in local non-profit organisations;

- All inhabitants of the north of Bordeaux (including Les Aubiers district);

How did the Learning Circle work in practice?

At the beginning of the Learning circle (first sessions) all members completed a questionnaire regarding their profile, their previous experience of taking part in the Learning Circles and motivation for participation.

The learning circle started in November 2012 and will finish in June 2013. There is one session of 1 hour every month (on Saturday mornings).

All members agreed on the following:

- the topics to discuss each month;
- the common product to be created at the end of the LC sessions;
- a weblog;
- the specific role of each member regarding the weblog;

The Learning circle takes place in a small room of the library.

Library employee acts as a facilitator and assumes the following responsibilities:

- facilitation of the discussion between the members;

- suggest topics for discussion, readings and other supports;

- maintain a link between project partners (IFAID and partners from other countries);

- presentation the readings that the members of the learning circle particularly like in the library at the end of the month;

Developing the learning circle and keeping it fresh

All members are very motivated. Each member has a specific role regarding its skills and willingness (implementing the web log, writing articles, taking pictures etc.)

An important aim of the LC is to learn from each other. Also, an IFAID trainer taught two people of the LC how to create and use a weblog. Once trained, two members of the LC trained up another two members of the learning circle.

The LC members decided to meet up themselves for 1 hour prior to the LC on a monthly basis in order to produce the Weblog (without the facilitator).

Before each session, members of the LC are researching readings related to the topic chosen (one new topic each month). They have to write a presentation of one of the readings they particularly liked. After, they present this text to the group at the beginning of each session.

After each session, the facilitator is presenting in railings of the library the readings that the LC members liked the more. So, every visitors of the library can see those railings.

Were there any parts of the learning circle or its operation that gave rise to difficulties?

At the beginning, they were some difficulties with the weblog which were later resolved.

Another difficulty was finding time between the sessions to work on the blog.

What aspects of the learning circle worked particularly well?

- Learning from each other;

- Motivation of the members ;

- Good atmosphere in the group;

- Respect of each other's in the group;

- Although the group is composed of people from very different backgrounds (age, education, employment status etc), the members developed very strong relationships.

- Participation and collaboration between members; A members of the LC is originally from Salvador and uses Spanish for writing. Members of the LC help with the translation into English.

Evaluation

The LC helped to develop strong relationship between the members.

All members are participating in the discussions.

Regular attendance to all sessions.

The participation in the LC helped develop the pleasure of readings and encouraged members to widen their taste in topics and genres of reading.

Members learned to create a blog.

Members developed IT and writing skills further.

Members improve self-confidence.

Critical success factors

- Motivation of the LC members

- Participation of all members in the discussion

- Good atmosphere within the group

- Common interest in the topics of the LC

- Common interest in the product

What was the impact of the learning circle?

The LC will continue upon the PALS project completion, as members are keen to continue.

The creation of the blog should make it possible to share discussion about readings with a large group of people in and outside their immediate community. It could also attract new members for the learning circles. The blog may interest other reading committees in the locality.

In the future, the LC hopes that the blog they created will be hosted in the new Bordeaux libraries website: http://bibliotheque.bordeaux.fr/.

The PALS project enabled library workers to meet other European project partners

and other staff working in libraries in other European cities. Indeed, in Portugal, the learning circle was also implemented in a library (Loures library) and was also facilitated by library workers. The library workers from France and Portugal decided to have regular contact via e-mail and collaborate in the future.

Resources

The list of resources is very long as for each session each member were reading several books, newspapers, etc.

The address of the blog created by the LC members is: www.enviesdelectures.wordpress.com

Members of the LC (during the visit of European partners)

Members of the LC (during one of the LC sessions)

LC members working on the weblog

LC members working on the weblog

PALS Project Case Study
Raise it Now – Associação, Portugal

Main Organisation	José Saramago Public Library
Learning Circle Title	**Summer of my childhood**

Delivery Organisation	**José Saramago Public Library (JSPL)**
Location	Workshop Expressions Room @ Library

BACKGROUND

After a successful outreach summer activity named "Books in the Park" we realised there was the potential to start a new approach towards those people who do not really use the library. One of the barriers is related to low writing and reading skills, especially for women who dropped out of school when they were very young.

So we thought it might be interesting for them to set up an informal learning setting using the Learning Circle technique. The motto was: "If you like to listening to and telling stories, please do join us. Come on and share your childhood stories."

The entire Learning Circle was aimed at triggering memories of participants' early days. Creating a space for dialogue in a format slightly different than the usual conversation. We used literature as a mirror, promoting an open dialogue between the participants' childhood memories and the childhood memories of some of the greatest Portuguese Writers of the 20th century.

GROUP PROFILE

- Total number of participants: 11 with 7 of them more regular attendees;

- Age: between 40 and 60 years old;

- Gender: mainly women, 2 male participants;

- Education: most participants with only elementary schooling;

- Employment status: some retired and one unemployed;

- Motivation: Pleasure in telling and listening to stories; willingness to learn new things; sharing of memories;

- Personal goals: satisfaction in making and reading poems; way to keep the mind occupied and quality leisure time.

HOW DID THE LEARNING CIRCLE WORK IN PRACTICE?

During three months, once a week, for two hours, participants were welcomed in a room specially arranged for them, where they could read and listen to some well-known childhood memories of Portuguese writers, inviting them to recall the their

own personal memories.

The assessment allowed to see how far everyone has reached, not only the LC participants but also the municipal team involved. It was a transformational learning process through which participants felt more empowered to make a proper use of the public library as a community living room, especially those who were quite skeptical in the beginning.

An informal and unconventional learning environment, exchange of experiences, assigned in a permanent inter-generational dialogue involving people with low-levels of education, tiny reading habits and that usually do not attend the library.

Knowing different habits and customs, family life, learning processes, reading difficulties, jokes and, above all, arouse curiosity for human underlying some of the great Portuguese writers, calling their own memories and experiences and sharing them orally and in writing.

Each participant is asked to be both a facilitator and a member responsible for the circulation of ideas, knowledge and thoughts.

DEVELOPING THE LEARNING CIRCLE AND KEEPING IT FRESH

The participants were always very enthusiastic and it was easy from the beginning to create a culture of respect for the opinions and feelings of each other, stimulating bonds of empathy among everyone. Participants were also invited to share their own experiences and stories, thoughts, which has motivated their presence and strongly determined the increase in length of sessions. This attitude keeps up with regular visits from some of the participants which previously had not visited the library.

The group dynamic was excellent, considering the differences in age and past of the different participants. Even though there were people more communicative than others, talking stick ended up not being used.

Photographs were taken and some videos were made and opinions were collected with the aim of producing a documentary, which led, once again, to great enthusiasm among the participants.

WERE THERE ANY PARTS OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE OR ITS OPERATION THAT GAVE RISE TO DIFFICULTIES?

- Perhaps the fact that some of the participants were unable to attend all the sessions;
- Irregular attendance of some participants due to other commitments;
- Short duration of the sessions (two hour session only);
- There should have been two more sessions for more sharing and participants interaction.

WHAT ASPECTS OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE WORKED PARTICULARLY WELL?

- Affectivity, emotions, feelings shared between the participants;
- Recollection of personal memories;

- Being challenged to write;

- New friendships and sharing among participants;

- The scenario that was prepared by the JSPL team;

- Intergenerational encounter;

- Knowledge of new texts and unfamiliar writers;

- Knowledge acquisition;

- Conversation about the writer's and author's childhood;

- Relationship between literature and affectivity;

- Discovery of writer's memories.

EVALUATION

A sort of informal evaluation was carried out by the end of the different sessions, where participants were asked about their feelings regarding the LC and their opinions were collected (if they were enjoying it and it there as something we could do to improve it).
At the end of the last session people were asked to complete a small questionnaire of evaluation - a A4 sheet - regarding their levels of satisfaction with respect to participation, methodology used, results achieved, logistics, duration and some comments were asked concerning strengths and weaknesses. Those that were unable to fill it we asked them the questions orally and we wrote down their answers for them.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Having home-made jams, tea, coffee and many home-made cakes;
- Having a relaxed and friendly environment ;
- The facilitator and the library team arranged and decorated the room with several baskets full of books, pictures, toys and black and white photos of the authors;
- Participants were invited to bring their own memorabilia, pictures, family albums, toys and games from their childhood. These were also used to trigger memories in a close dialogue with the texts from the authors.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE?

- Some participants were not familiar with the writers selected readings and/or parts of their biography;

- Some of the participants change positively their views regarding some writer's previous opinions;

- All participants are more engaged in the JSPL activities, they become more participative in the library activities;

- Some participants got to know and talk about at least one of the authors which was selected for this particular Learning Circle;

- Linking common people everyday childhood memories with renowned and published authors and realised they are not that different after all.

RESOURCES

There was an extensive bibliography of different Portuguese speaking writers, which was used through the reading of different excerpts by all, with special emphasis on gender chronicle, novel, poetry, diary, autobiography, as well as some articles from a few magazines and newspapers. Photographs, musical excerpts and a documentary were additionally included.
The participants were still encouraged to share photos of their own childhood and bring a few personal items related to these memories, which they did with great enthusiasm.

PALS Project Case Study
Association for Education and Sustainable Development, ROMANIA

Main Organisation	*Association for Education and Sustainable Development*
Learning Circle Title	What active citizenship means to us

Delivery Organisation	County Council
Location	County Council premises

Background

This learning circle was held during Volunteer Week, an event organised annually by the Calarasi County Council. Initially, the intention was to organise a learning circle for local NGOs in order to share their experiences and project results and to create a cooperation atmosphere between them. However, due to some changes in the event agenda, this year Volunteer Week concentrated on the theme of *European* Year *for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations*. The event involved mostly schools, namely pupils and teachers. The main activities consisted of artistic moments performed by the pupils for older people from residential care centres, and encouraging young generations to spend quality time with older ones.

Using the opportunity of this event and with help of the organiser, the learning circle (LC) was made known among the event participants and they were asked to join the LC.

The LC did not come up as a need during the event, but we wanted to use the publicity and the dissemination potential of the event in order to promote the LC method and to involve public that we would not have reached if it had not been for the event.

Group profile

The group profile is heterogeneous as concerns age, however their main common point is school. The number of participants raised to 16 participants, mostly females and one male. Our group consisted of 9 pupils between 9 to 16 years and 5 teachers aged between 30 and 50 years old, one facilitator and one circle guardian. None of them were familiar with the LC methodology till it was presented.

It is difficult to affirm that the participants had a motivation per se to participate in the LC, however the LC was very popular as number of participants indicate. One can presume that the curiosity was the primarily motivation of the participants. That is why when asked to participate in the LC a relatively large number of people showed up. Another reason may be that we succeeded to use the dynamic and the momentum created by the event and so to attract people.

We also can say that the motivational resort of participants laid on the pleasure of

discussion and exchanging ideas.

How did the Learning Circle work in practice?

The LC was organised for the three consecutive sessions that lasted approximately an hour. During the first session, we made a short presentation about what is a LC, why should we use it and how it functions. Then we made a formal assessment of the participants' starting point by using the questionnaire. The theme of the LC and the next meeting was also agreed during this session. The theme was chosen from the ones proposed in the questionnaire and being ticked by the most people.

During the second meeting the group rules were agreed, the roles of the facilitator and guardian were explained, talking stick was introduced and its function was explained. The discussion started with self presentation mentioning also the favourite book or film and why. Then the discussion focused on the theme.

Group dynamic was surprisingly good considering the difference of status between participants (teacher – pupil) and also considering age (9 – 50). The willingness and the pleasure to participate in the discussion were sensed equally from all participants. Few persons were more reserved in discussions, but the talking stick did its job. Some participants were too talkative but again the talking stick had an important role in not interfering with others' discourse. Also we realised the importance of the facilitator in keeping the discussion balanced.

The circle was partially filmed and pictures were taken.

Developing the learning circle and keeping it fresh

Unfortunately for us, the learning circle lasted as long as the Volunteer Week lasted. After this event the school exams started and we did not succeed to keep the circle going. As we said above, the learning circle benefited from the marketing and momentum created by the event but also ended as soon as the event was over.

Because we only met three times, it was not a question of keeping fresh and developing the discussion because the people were eager to talk and to express their opinion.

Were there any parts of the learning circle or its operation that gave rise to difficulties?

Our difficulties were related to the willingness of participants to spend time for learning circle outside the Volunteer Week event. This is why we suspect that their internal motivation to participate remained at the stage of curiosity and we did not succeeded to grow this motivation during the learning circle. Another reason may be that in their minds the learning circle was strictly related to Volunteer Week so when the event was over, the circle was over.

What aspects of the learning circle worked particularly well?

The general conversation went very well. People, teachers and pupils, talked very openly and easily. They enjoyed discussing a relatively new subject to them and to understand the concept of active citizenship.

Evaluation

An informal evaluation was carried out at the end of the third session. People were asked how they felt about participating in the learning circle. Common opinion was favourable, people seemed very excited to participate considering the learning circle as a good way to learn new things, share experience, talk and circulate ideas.

Critical success factors

1. Internal motivation of participants

2. The genuine interest in the topic

3. The open attitudes of participants toward accepting other opinions, ideas

4. The willingness to have a constructive discussion not a contradictory one

What was the impact of the learning circle?

We do not think that such a short term learning circle could have an impact for personal development of the participants. We could say that maybe the participants widened their views about the topic discussed.

Resources

Asked about what an active citizen is, a 10 years old girl said: "When you think about doing a good thing, you should put it in practice – that's what an active citizen is!"

PALS Project Case Study
Association for Education and Sustainable Development, ROMANIA

Main Organisation	*Association for Education and Sustainable Development*
Learning Circle Title	Parents -Teenagers communication

Delivery Organisation	AESD
Location	Public School no.5 premises

Background
Today, the parents' communication with their teenagers is very difficult. More and more parents complain about their teen kids` behaviour and more and more parents are dissatisfied with their lack of interest for school, reading, society and all that is around them. This happens in more and more families, because adults cannot communicate with their children and they cannot understand what is wrong. The children say: "Leave me alone! I know what I have to do!" or "You are very outdated, your ideas are bad (or old)" and parents keep comparing values and attitudes from their time.
Group profile
Number of participants - 8 Age – 35-45 years old Gender – 7 females and 1 male Prior knowledge and experience – they have 1 or 2 children, age range 13-15 years olds Motivation: They are very worried about their relationship with their children and they are scared and concerned about their future Personal goals   - Better communication with their children   - Increased involvement of their children in intellectual activities   - Reducing hours spent on the computer by their children   - An extra hour for discussion with their children   - Find a secret told by their child/children
How did the Learning Circle work in practice?
Each person shares the last conversation with his/her child/children.

How long was this last conversation?

What was the topic for this last conversation?

What was the last word of their children in this last conversation?

What was the last word of parents in this last conversation?

Each learning circle lasted approximately 1,5 hours.

Ground rules/learning circle agreement:

- − No phone
- − No delays
- − Respect for speakers
- − Argumentation necessary

Physical environment – the meeting took place in a classroom with chairs arranged in a circle.

The facilitator kept the discussion on topic, mediated conflicts and proposed a change of tone when it was inappropriate. This is possible, if the facilitator is motivated and skilled and the group follow the imposed rules.

Each person is entitled to speak to express personal opinion. There is space left for possible debates, group members being permanently encouraged to bring arguments to support their opinions.

The participants realise that they are not alone in this problem, having to face the lack of communication, they understood the importance of being more tolerant, more attentive to their child's inner needs.

They must spend more time with children without particular or personal interest. Simple discussions about minor issues might be beneficial for building a good relationship.

Developing the learning circle and keeping it fresh

Improvement in language process – free argumentation, respect for speakesr, patience, avoidance of direct confrontation;

Improvement in tolerance levels;

More and more motivating discussions (personal records) brought into discussion;

Empathy towards other people's problems.

Were there any parts of the learning circle or its operation that gave rise to difficulties?

No difficulties were encountered. The subject was well received and participants were eager to improve their communication skills with their teenagers.

What aspects of the learning circle worked particularly well?

Imagine various topics for discussion and role playing the situations.

Outdoor session when a group of teenagers with their language and behaviour were carefully noticed. Further discussions would be easier this way. They could

make lists with positive and negative aspects related to these teenagers, bringing objective arguments for their choice.

Then, they could compare these teenagers with their own children, generating a list of possible actions that could improve relationships and communication.

Evaluation

We tried to avoid formal evaluations, but informal ones were completed.

Participants by the power of example could change their behaviour and attitude towards the relationship with their children.

Critical success factors

An extra hour for discussion with their children.

Some participants revealed that they were told a secret by their child/children
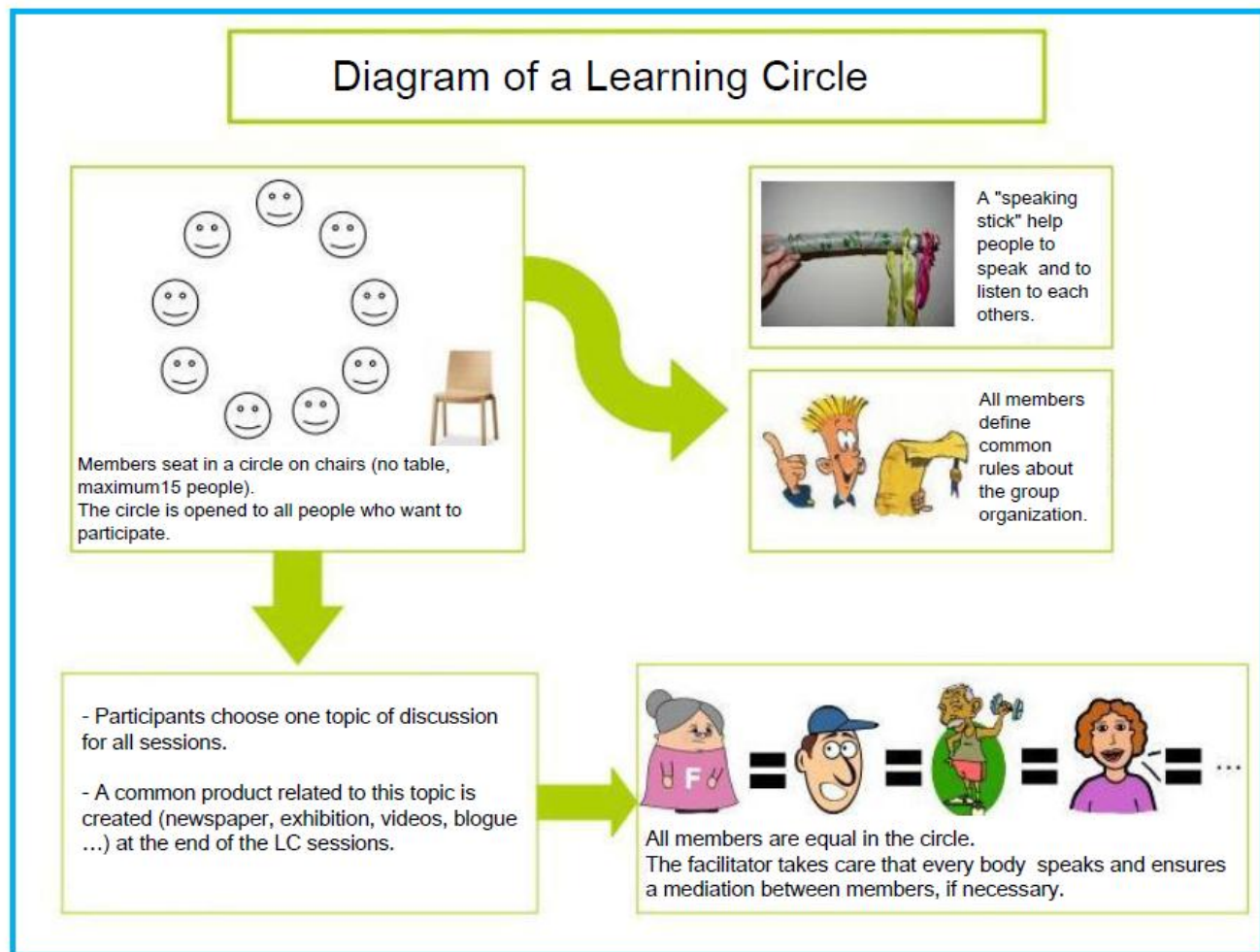
What was the impact of the learning circle?

Positioning the people in circle made them more sociable and friendly. The problems were exposed simply, openly and directly. Participants tried to unify their interest to solve the communication problems they had with their children, even if some problems were not common. Although some problems were particular, they have been discussed with interest. The centre of the circle even imaginary (not physically materialised) unifies common problems and co-vibrates with every participant. Circular disposing helped everybody to look directly toward every discussion partner.
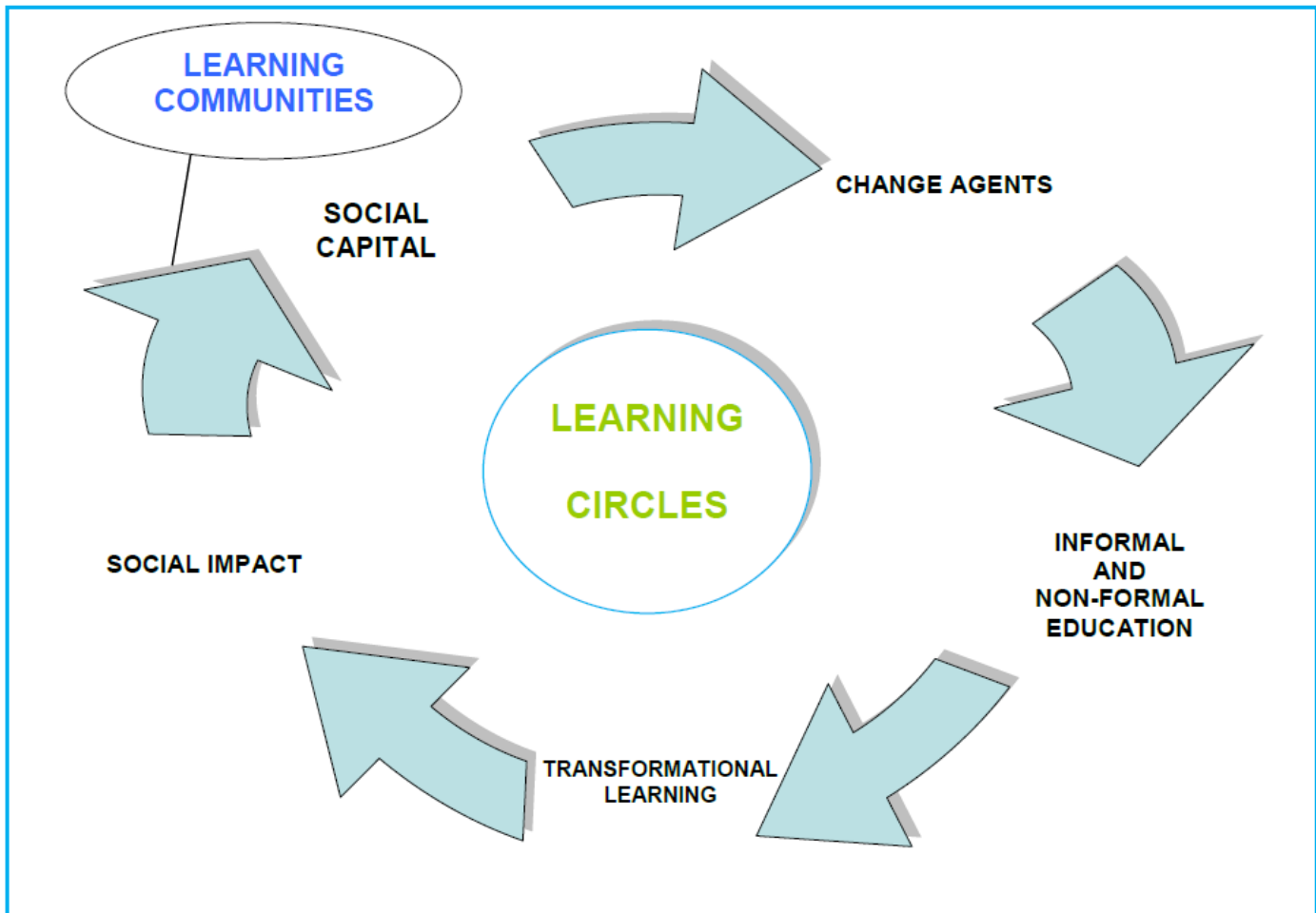
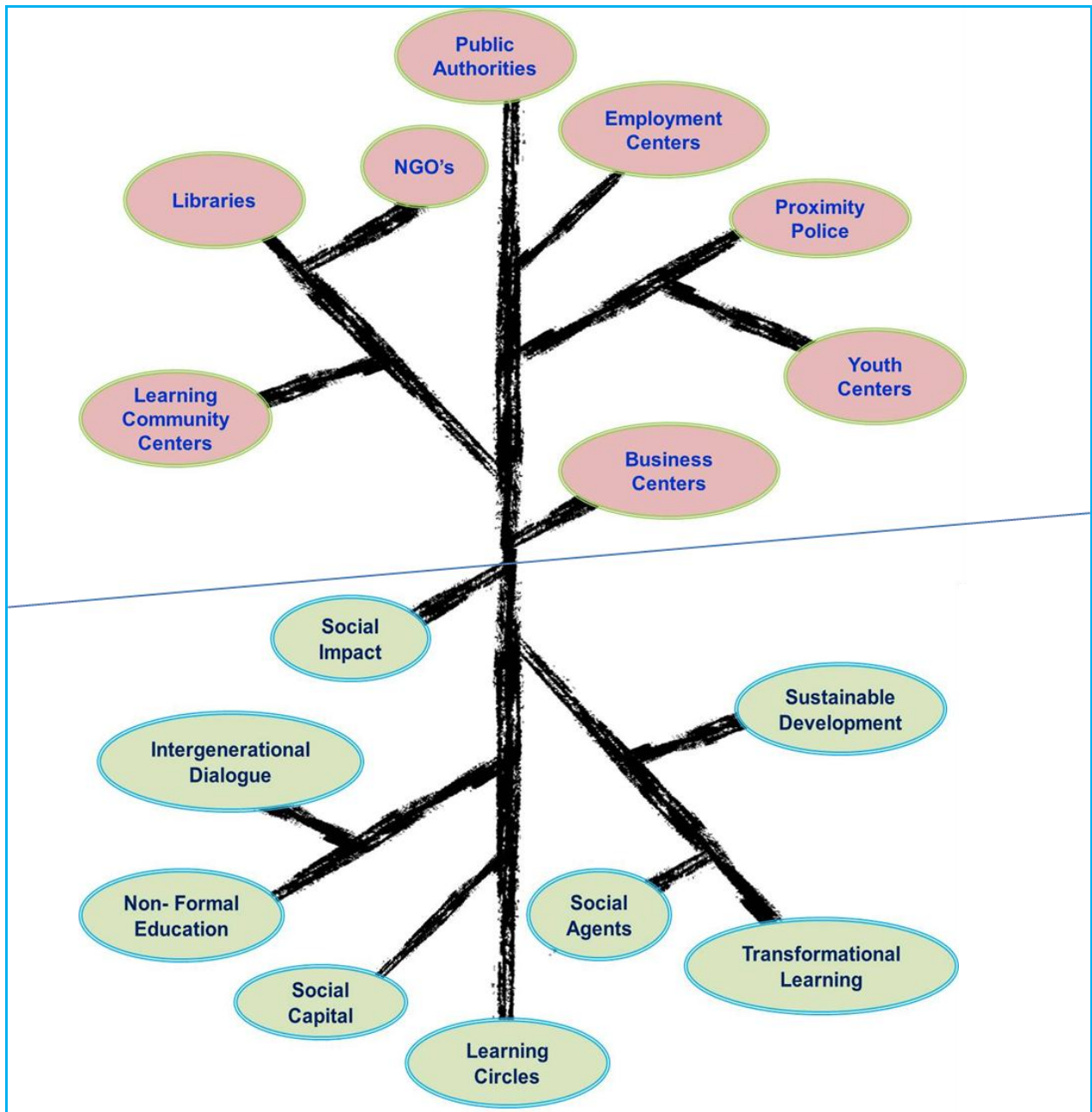**Resources**

APPENDIX 2: DIAGRAM OF A LEARNING CIRCLE

Diagram of a Learning Circle

Members seat in a circle on chairs (no table, maximum 15 people).
The circle is opened to all people who want to participate.

A "speaking stick" help people to speak and to listen to each others.

All members define common rules about the group organization.

- Participants choose one topic of discussion for all sessions.

- A common product related to this topic is created (newspaper, exhibition, videos, blogue …) at the end of the LC sessions.

All members are equal in the circle.
The facilitator takes care that every body speaks and ensures a mediation between members, if necessary.

Adapted by PALS Project partners

APPENDIX 3: CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF LEARNING CIRCLES

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

SOCIAL CAPITAL

CHANGE AGENTS

LEARNING CIRCLES

SOCIAL IMPACT

INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

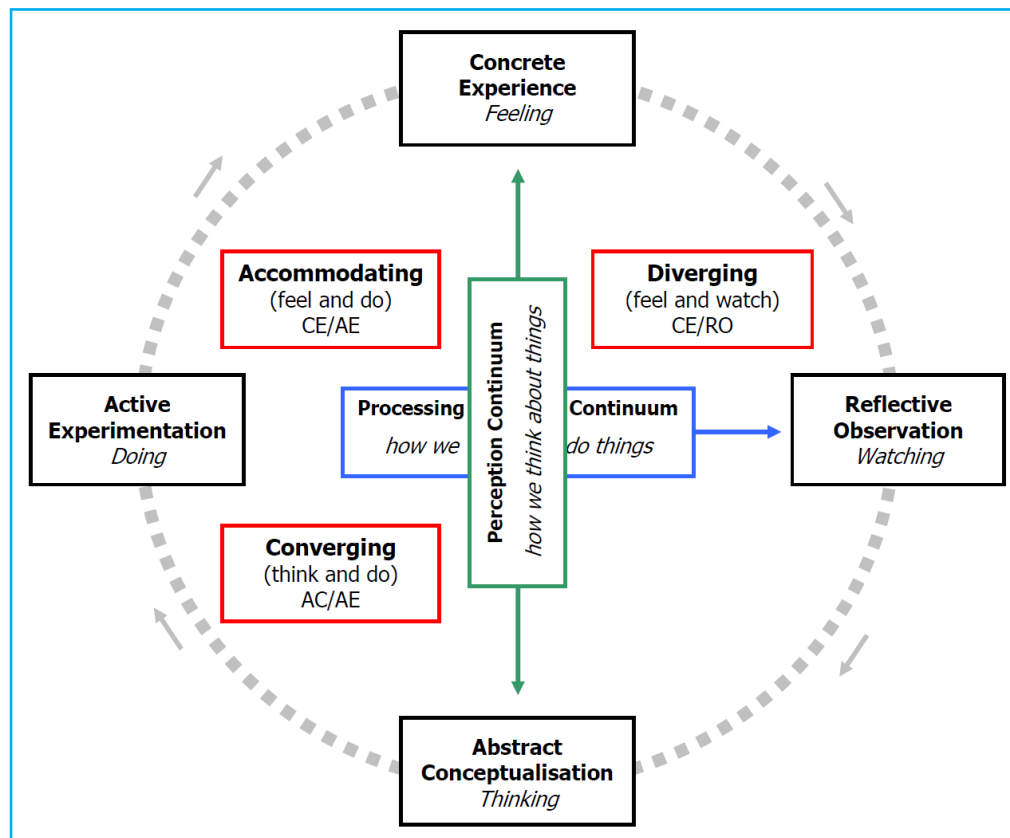**Concept of PALS Project partners**

APPENDIX 4: MODEL FOR DELIVERING LEARNING CIRCLES

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APPENDIX 5: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS

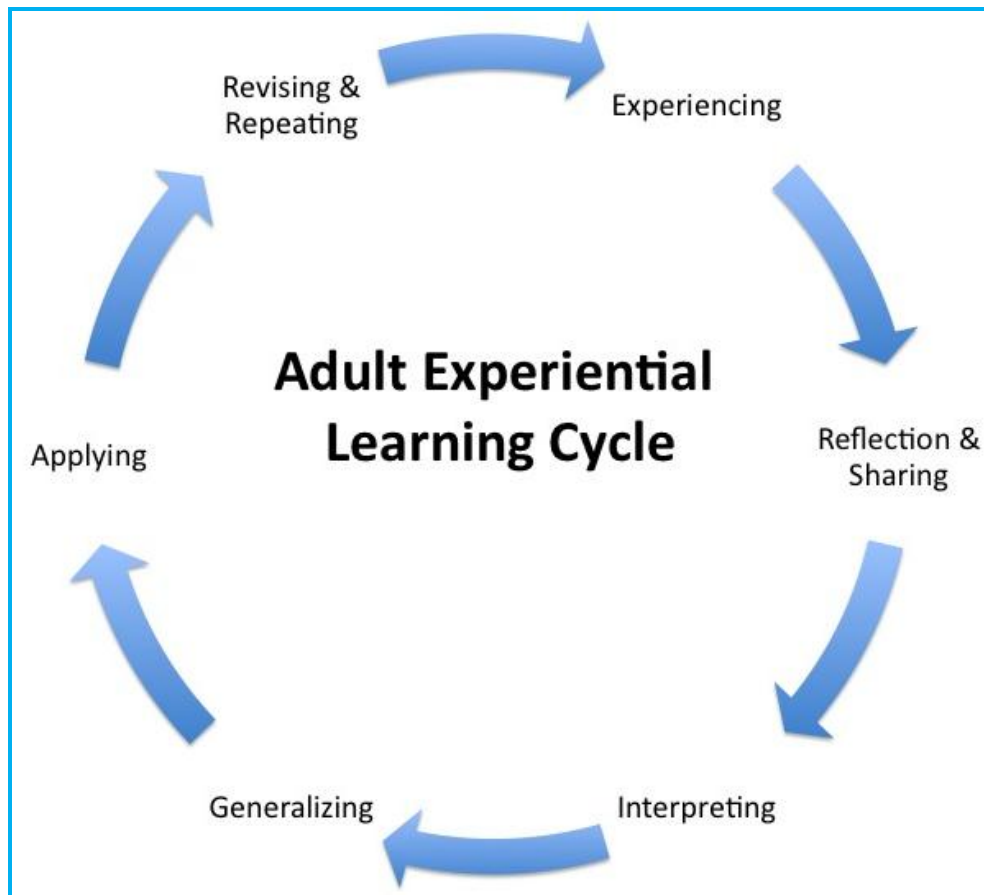## Model 1: Kolb's learning styles

Concept David Kolb, adaptation and design Alan Chapman 2005-06, based on Kolb's learning styles, 1984

Kolb's learning styles - matrix view

	doing (Active Experimentation - AE)	watching (Reflective Observation - RO)
feeling (Concrete Experience - CE)	accommodating (CE/AE)	diverging (CE/RO)
thinking (Abstract Conceptualization - AC)	converging (AC/AE)	assimilating (AC/RO)

Font: http://www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

Model 2: Adult Experiential Learning

Mike Desjardins
http://www.virtusinc.com/2009/02/25/adult-experiential-learning-cycle/

Model 3: Experiential Learning Cycles
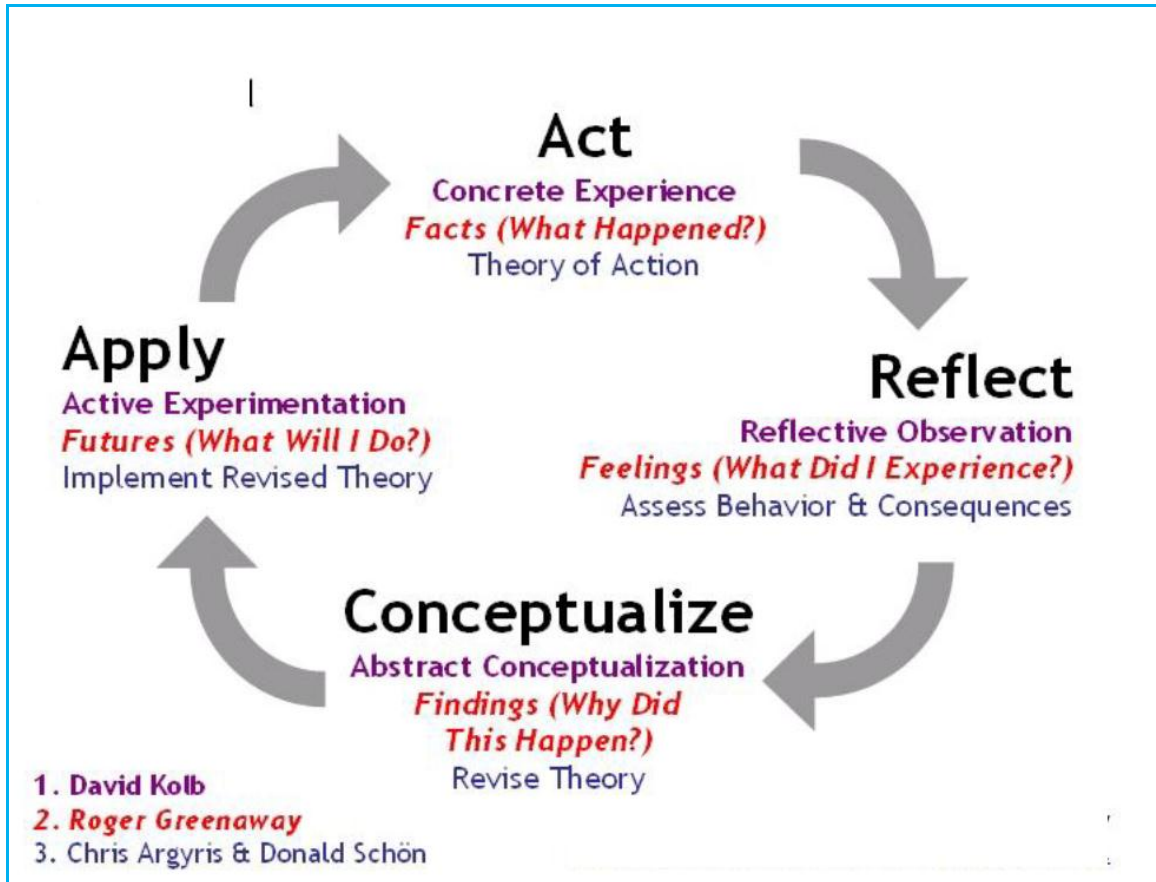
Compiled by Andrea Corney:

http://www.edbatista.com/2007/experiential.html

APPENDIX 6: GROUP PROFILE TEMPLATE

Name / Country of origin	Gender/ Age	Prior learning	Background/Characteristics	Reason for joining

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APPENDIX 7: GROUP PROFILE EXAMPLE

Learning Circle Activity - Group Profile

Name/Country of origin	Gender/Age	Prior learning	Background/Characteristics	Reason for joining
Jorge (1) Britain	M 55	Uneducated – he can read and write but otherwise has no interest in education. He reads the Sun newspaper.	Brian is a large man with a number of prominent tattoos and large gold ring in one ear. He has a broken nose and is powerful and threatening build. A very jolly and friendly personality, exuberant and outgoing. He has a criminal record and has been in prison but makes jokes about prison life. He says what he thinks and does not bother with cultural or ethnic sensitivities. He expresses the view that if "*people want to live in the UK they have to accept it as it is*". He is prepared to stand up and be counted. Brian does not like the idea of the local council telling local people that they cannot have a valuable local facility that is well used.	He feels passionately that the closure of the local sports hall will badly affect the local community. He will fight to save it.
Shaida (2) Pakistan	F 25	Educated in Britain. She has 5 GCSE's but has not entered higher or further education.	Shaida has been resident in the UK for most of her adult life. She is single, very shy and reserved and for her to attend the learning circle is a big step outside her restricted family environment. Shiada has a history of mental health and currently suffers from depression. She lives with her parents and finds it difficult to express her views in the presence of males; her usual role is not to do so. Shaida holds very strong views about the proposed closure of the local sports hall and has a very strong personal interest in preventing its closure. It is her only recreation and principal activity outside the family.	She uses the sports hall as one of her main interests outside the family and would not be allowed by the family to travel outside the area. Furthermore she attends the women only classes.

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APPENDIX 8: INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Partners in Adult Learning

Lifelong Learning

QUESTIONNAIRE OF IDENTIFICATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Part 1: General Information

1) Gender:

☐ Female
☐ Male

2) Age:
Please, select from following possibilities:

○ 18-24
○ 25-30
○ 31-40
○ 41-50
○ 51 and more

3) Occupation:
Please, select from following possibilities:

☐ Farmer/Farm work
☐ Office worker
☐ Service and sales workers
☐ Manager
☐ Workman
☐ Retired
☐ Without activities/Unemployed
☐ Student
☐ Other…………………………………………………………………………………………

1

4) Studies
What is your level of studies?
Please, select from following possibilities:

☐ GCSE'S under C grade (D-G)

☐ Youth Training (NVQ Level 1, 2)

☐ BTEC First Diploma/
GNVQ Foundation (NVQ Level 1)

☐ GCSE'S under C grade (D-G)

☐ A levels

☐ BTEC National Diploma

☐ Advanced (NVQ Level 3)

☐ BTEC Higher National Diploma

☐ Diploma of Higher Education

☐ BA, BS/BSc

☐ MS/MSc, MA

☐ Master's Degree in Engineering

☐ MA/M

☐ Master's Degree, MS/MSc

☐ PhD

5) Nationality

6) Are you a member of a non-profit organization?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Without answer

7) If so, which one?

8) Are you involved in your neighborhood's life?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Without answer

9) In which way?

2

Part 2: The learning circle and you

10) Do you know the tool called Learning Circle?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Without answer

11) Have you already participated in a learning circle?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Without answer

...If not, go directly to the question 8.

12) What was your role in the learning circle?
Tick one or more options.

☐ Participant

☐ Facilitator

☐ Observer

☐ Organizer

☐ Other

13) What was the duration of the learning circle?
Please, select from following possibilities:

☐ 4 weeks

☐ 5 weeks

☐ 6 weeks

☐ 7 weeks

☐ Other……………………………………………………………………………………

14) What was the duration of each session?
Please, select from following possibilities:

☐ 30 minutes

☐ 1 hour

3

☐ 1 hour and half

☐ 2 hours

☐ Other………………………………………………………………………………………

15) How have you known this tool?

☐ By an organization

☐ By a friend

☐ By medias

☐ On flyers

☐ Other………………………………………………………………………………………

16) Do you think it is a good tool?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Without answer

17) Why?

18) If not, why have you never taken part in a Learning circle?
Tick one or more options

☐ Lack of information

☐ Lack of interest for the suggested theme

☐ Lack of time

☐ Not interested

☐ Lack of opportunity

☐ Other:

4

19) What role would you like to have in a Learning circle?
Tick one or more options

- ☐ Participant
- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ Observer
- ☐ Organizer
- ☐ Other………………………………………………………………………………

20) Which thematic would you like to broach?
Tick one or more options

- ☐ Environment
- ☐ Sustainability
- ☐ Citizenship
- ☐ Interculturality
- ☐ Others

21) What are you expecting for?

5

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APPENDIX 9: CASE STUDY TEMPLATE

BLANK
PALS Project Case Study

Main Organisation	
Learning Circle Title	

Delivery Organisation	
Location	

BACKGROUND

- Set out details on the circumstances in which the pilot Learning Circle was set up and what you hoped to achieve.

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

GROUP PROFILE

Some suggestions could include:

- Age
- gender
- Existing subject knowledge
- Motivation
- personal goals
- prior knowledge

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

HOW DID THE LEARNING CIRCLE WORK IN PRACTICE?

- This section that should outline how your learning circle worked in practice. It should include any educational methods used to develop the learning circle. Some suggestions could include:
- How did you assess the participants' starting knowledge?
- Duration of the learning circle.

- Ground rules/learning circle agreement?
- How did you plan and agree the subjects for discussion?
- Any goal setting – individual or group?
- The physical environment.
- Facilitator skills.
- Attendance.
- Benefits.
- Maintaining an inclusive, equitable and motivating learning environment.
- Group dynamics.
- Any record keeping.

(between two to four paragraphs)

DEVELOPING THE LEARNING CIRCLE AND KEEPING IT FRESH

- The role of the facilitator.
- How did you track progress?
- Evolution of the learning circle.

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

WERE THERE ANY PARTS OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE OR ITS OPERATION THAT GAVE RISE TO DIFFICULTIES?

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

WHAT ASPECTS OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE WORKED PARTICULARLY WELL?

- Comment on the learning circle as a learning method for the group.

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

EVALUATION

- Any formal or informal evaluation carried out?
- Reflection - Bearing in mind what you have learned from the experience what would you do differently if you ran the learning circle again?
- Any changes in attitude or behaviour. (how were these measured?)

(approximately one or two paragraphs)

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS
(List three or four bullet points)
WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE LEARNING CIRCLE?
(approximately one or two paragraphs)
RESOURCES

APPENDIX 10: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL (EXERCISE)

Things that **you are already doing** that help build social capital	Things that **you** can do to build social capital	Things that **your organisation** can do to build social capital

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APPENDIX 11: OUTLINE OF A LEARNING CIRCLE TRAINING

Day	Subject	Learning Outcomes
1	**Understand Learning Circles**	By the end of this session you should be able to define the concept and primary characteristics of a learning circle; distinguish between a learning circle, classroom and other modes of learning and identify the strengths of a learning circle as a transformational approach to learning.
1	**Setting up a successful Learning Circle**	By the end of this session you will have been introduced to the practical requirements of setting up a successful learning circle. Topics will cover advertising a learning circle; selecting a target audience; applying equal opportunities and diversity in the field and defining roles and responsibilities.
1	**The management of a Learning Circle**	By the end of this session you will have a working knowledge of the non-hierarchical structure which is at the core of a learning circle and understand the application of self-management principles. You will also consider the effective exploitation of learning circle resources; the dynamics of small-group learning; monitoring and tracking progress and the dissemination of the circle product.
1	**Role of a Facilitator**	By the end of this session you will have been introduced to the core skills required to be an effective facilitator. These will extend to time management; dispute resolution techniques; the distinction between facilitating and leadership and strategies to energise and motivate a learning circle. You will have explored a key set of ground rules for effective learning circle operation.
2	**Harnessing social capital**	By the end of this session you should have a broad understanding of the concept of social capital and its significance in learning circles. You should also have a working knowledge of the application of social capital in practice.
2	**Measuring the impact of a Learning Circle**	By the end of this session you will have learnt how to track and assess progress and use critical reflection as an evaluative tool. You will be introduced to principles of analysis of data captured throughout the life-cycle of the learning circle and evaluation of your product. The session material will extend to closing procedures and legacy.

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APPENDIX 12:

LEARNING CIRCLES AS A RESEARCH TOOL by A. Semedo

Learning circles as research tools

Alice Semedo

My experience in using learning circles as a methodological tool for research, stems from a collaborative research project – *Porto Museums: Challenges for the constructions of [collaborative] territories* – undertaken with museum education professionals, in Porto (Portugal).

At the beginning learning circles were used rather intuitively not only because they appeared most suitable to work with communities of practice but also because this research project was seeking to build with the group a culture of reflexivity and of intense collaborative action. Learning circles for all the reasons I shall be pointing out seemed therefore most appropriate to support the

construction of a social space for group interaction, the sharing of skills, knowledge and values while at the same time building its capacity and identifying both its expertise and its visions for the future. Importantly, this space sought to be taken up as boundary-crossing and thus as a fluid, liquid space which would distinctively enhance a deeply critical and plural museum culture.

Clearly the project anticipated to disseminate knowledge and train community members in a variety of reflective / critical / creative skills that could be usefully used to examine and re-imagine community resources and knowledge. The project's aspirations were thus transformative and profoundly related with the making of the public space and with the museum as a democratic space. Also, it took on the accentuation of positive features of group members, which meant, for example, working together and sharing best practices, appreciating each other's' competencies and skills. These learning / reflective spaces were seen, therefore, as a fundamental condition for the creation of these transformational reflective practice spaces which were person centred and aimed at enriching and promoting human (creative) flourishing for all involved.

At this point I must say that Senge's work (1994) apropos learning organisations was most useful to think about all these different questions guiding us to better envisage how all these aspirations could usefully be explored namely within workshops and learning circles. In the opening paragraphs of his book, *The Fifth Discipline,* he defines learning organisations as "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1994: 8). The core of learning organisation work is based according to this view on five "learning disciplines" (Senge 1994: 10-12): *systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning*. Knowledge is here associated with active participation in cultural practices, practices which are seen as fundamental to learners'/ members' appropriation of knowledge-building resources. Hence the learning context is not merely a physical setting but a social structure that can foster learning, develop competencies and manage knowledge; features that constitute a "community of practice" (Wenger et al 2002: 11).

These different aims were developed collaboratively among all project members (including a team of consultation peers) and throughout its early stages and each partner involved played an important role and made contributions that were only possible because of their particular ability and expertise. This collaboration represented a multi-faceted partnership with many individuals, museums and other organizations involved. The participation of all partners throughout the developmental processes was fundamental for its success during the implementation phase. In reality, all partners were responsible for on-going engagement and overall project operation and each partner brought specific skills and experience to the project.

A further disclosed action research agenda involved not only acknowledging and addressing power dynamics within the group but also expected to create spaces for new leaderships to develop within the group. Again, the use of learning circles during the different workshops delivered appeared as an appropriate device not only placing an emphasis on discussion and reflection within the group but also fostering collaboration across museums. This approach aimed at amplifying the voices of *invisible* members of the group and an opportunity for new leaderships to develop, becoming more inclusive of *other* visions within the sector. The purpose was to learn from one another and, for example, to think about how to evaluate and communicate the impact of museum education work or how to increase the capacity of boundary-crossing leadership to foster alterations so urgently needed to significantly address social changes and the city / the world at large. The learning circle approach was perceived as a supportive, warm / affective environment where members could open up to each other and explore freely and more deeply what worked out or did not in their museums; what was relevant to them, how they envisaged the future and so on.

In fact, with time and with an on-going commitment to engage around a common purpose, trusted relationships were built and a greater capacity for listening and integrating learning was developed. Learning circles are certainly wonderful spaces to share stories and storytelling can weave connexions among those in the group through shared recognition of the values and emotions expressed in the stories. As bonds of empathy form, greater trust arises. Truly we learned these types of projects involve commitment both of intensity and duration

(we met regularly once a month for a year and each thematic session was led by a different facilitator) and in our case they also involved affect and play.

The affective dimension is inseparable of this project and of our learning circles. It is made of affect and all relations we have been constructing with co-inquirers are, somehow, of complicity and affect. If *flourishing* is inherently related with learning the affective dimension cannot certainly be dismissed when we talk about these issues. As Damásio (1996), Alsop (2005), McIntosh (2010) and many others have already shown learning cannot be separated in the Cartesian sense between rational thought and emotion. All learning, even of the most logical topic, involves emotion, just as emotions virtually always involve cognition and some emotions (love, happiness, hope…) act to enhance learning and the *flow experience* Csikszentmihalyi (2002). Alsop says that education works best when it combines hearts and minds and citing Dewey (1931: 189 cit. in Alsop 2005: 4) he writes that "there is no education when ideas and knowledge are not translated into emotion, interest and volition".

Along these lines, our workshops and learning circles have also been intensive playful moments and have always included the opportunity to share some food. As Palus and Horth (2002: 107) noted the idea of serious play allows people to communicate even in the face of entrenched differences, drawing on a way of communicating that explores similarities and differences (see also Higgs *at al.* 2011). Play is also important because it has the potential to free participants from external concerns so that they may enter the state of *flow,* according to Csikszentmihalyi (2002). Although not every workshop and learning circle took on the same tone those that relied intensely on play envisaged activities which were conducted fast to generate energy and enjoyment and to produce a range of

diverse ideas. The processes involved provided opportunities for divergent and convergent thinking and the use of techniques to promote creativity, such as brainstorming and its variations. As for the use of food… as we all know it is and excellent ground for bonding.

A key factor for the success of this approach has been undoubtedly the experience, flexibility and creativity of the different facilitators involved who have been essential *inquiry tools* to facilitate reflection, adapting and constantly envisaging new strategies to work with the group, enabling group members to develop the skills for interplaying, *being critical* and *creative* through reflection, reflexivity and creative and cognitive critique, enabling them to develop competencies, qualities and necessary attributes (CQAs) for successful partnership collaboration and transformative empowerment. This dynamic and dialogical approach to learning means that it is understood as a process, emphasising aspects of change, flexibility and critical thinking. Even if not explicitly the five learning disciplines were always present.

Reflective exploration of questions and *artefacts* created during workshops was mainly done within learning circles groups. Group members' insights became a framework for a shared group understanding that included everyone's experiences and was then shared and discussed with the rest of the group contributing to the making of the group's knowledge capital, producing sometimes new understandings or the identification of new questions. Generally at the end of the session different visual challenges were offered to participants with questions to prompt the identification of deeper learning questions that emerged from the days' conversations, a practice that intended to established learning and reflection as a continuous journey. Learning circles were complemented by these *in-between* reflective spaces where participants were asked to freely write about experiences, explore ideas and make connections with what was explored during the monthly sessions. These journals were sometimes shared between members and mainly brought to sessions. Journal writing was therefore understood as a fundamental and complementary tool to work with the learning circle approach. Journals were understood as a profound way of knowing, a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000) of participants' motivations, thinking and practices; a place for reflection and

creative imagination and, consequently, understood as a transformative methodology itself.

Looking back at all sessions designed within this collaborative research project I think they all somehow supported the transformative agenda mentioned before, acting as a vehicle to explore, share and express knowledge while prompting different questions. We have meaningfully looked at an array of issues from different points of view and have created collaborative spaces for playing, thinking and re-imagining the future of the group / city / museums. The constant focus on thinking about the future and the writing of a manifesto for the group – this shared focus and sense of urgency – brought about a commitment to bring about change that was essential to motivate each other during the whole process. Learning circles were a fundamental framework to accomplish all this.

APPENDIX 13: EVALUATION TOOL

Partners in Adult Learning

Lifelong Learning

LEARNING CIRCLE EVALUATION

- Name of **Learning Circle**:
- Name of Organisation:
- Date and place :

1 - Which is your satisfaction degree :

1.1 -For having participated in this Learning Circle?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

1.2 - With the learning methodology used during this Learning Circle?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

1.3 – With the results reached in this Learning Circle?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

1.4 - With the facilities and logistics conditions during this Learning Circle?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

1.5 – With the duration of this Learning Circle ?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

2 - Which was your participation level and involvement in this project ?

☐ Not Involved   ☐ Somehow Involved   ☐ Involved   ☐Deep involved

3 – In your opinion what were the strengths and weaknesses of the Learning Circle ?

3.1 – The strengths: _____

_____

3.2 - The weaknesses

_____

_____

4 – Which is your general satisfaction degree with this activity ?

☐ Not at all Satisfied   ☐Not Satisfied   ☐ Partially Satisfied   ☐Satisfied   ☐Very satisfied

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APPENDIX 14: CERTIFICATE

F

CERTIFICATE

This certifies that:

NAME

Attended the Learning Circle "**Name of the Learning Circle**" held in "City", "Country", "date".

Facilitator:

Organization:

_____

_____

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Link for Training Materials:

Blogs:

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http://www.changethatmatters.co.uk/publication.htm
http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/Learning_Circle_1.pdf
https://wiki.umn.edu/pub/PetesWikiWeb/HomelessProject/LearningCircleDraft6.doc
https://www.facebook.com/groups/learningcommunities/

Blogs and Working Groups of PALS Project:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/learningcommunities/
http://pals-partnersinadultlearning.blogspot.pt/
http://enviesdelectures.wordpress.com/