SYLLABUS

TITLE PAGE - LEARNING CIRCLE COURSES

Please include the information below for each participant

Course Title: ***Practical Applications***	**Course Number:** EDIU 9125
First Name:	**Last Name:**
Grade Level/Content Area:	
Email:	

FINAL INVENTORY CHECKLIST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Please check each completed item:

_____ Title Page

_____ Learning Circle Rubric (Fill out top and instructor will complete and return)

_____ Facilitator Worksheet

_____ Questions and Goals

_____ Action Plan Worksheet

_____ Learning Circle Journal

_____ Reflections

_____ Course Evaluation

Please email this form with all completed course requirements to:

Gretchen McKay

Email: gmckay@umassglobal.edu

LEARNING CIRCLES: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS
3 UNITS

Introduction

Stories move in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles."

-Naomi Newman

Participants in this course must have completed Learning Circles: Professional Conversations for Change. This course is designed to build on the structure, trust, and research established in that course. Not all members of the group need to take this course but all members of this course need to have been part of the previous course.

Please read through the entire syllabus before you begin. Some of the activities may need to occur simultaneously and the linear approach of starting with Assignment #1 and continuing through Assignment #6 isn't the best strategy for this course. Also, it is not assumed that you saved the syllabus from the previous class so some of the general instructions will be repeated for your review and convenience.

HOW IS THIS COURSE DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRST ONE?

This course was designed so participants could review the Focusing Question and Action Plan created in Learning Circles: Professional Conversations for Change and test it in a systematic manner to see if what they thought might be a good plan of action really makes a difference in their teaching and learning situation. Group members will continue to meet and work together but the focus will not be so much on exploring existing research (although this process will continue) as on creating new research. Based loosely on the action research model, this course will guide the group through the process of determining what works and what doesn't. It's a fun process that can bring very satisfying results.

The idea of engaging in research may make some group members nervous and others excited. Either way, the process is accessible, informative, and allows teachers and administrators the opportunity to provide significant input regarding discussion related to the area of inquiry.

PREREQUISITES

The main prerequisite for involvement in any Learning Circle course is the commitment to stick with the process and be a contributing member of a professional group. In addition, you will need:

- Registration in *Learning Circles: Practical Applications.*
- An established Learning Circle group whose members have all completed a *Learning Circles: Professional Conversations for Change.*

- An Action Plan that can be tested for effectiveness. The *Action Plan* the group wrote for the first class will no doubt need refining. That refining process is part of this course.

HOW SHOULD THE GROUP BE ORGANIZED FOR THIS COURSE?

Re-establish the group using the same techniques you used to form it the first time. You will need to go through the same process of establishing group rules as before. It's a good idea to discuss any changes you might make in these rules to ensure the group's continued success.

- Choose a facilitator, or convener, for the group. The group may prefer to have the same facilitator or choose a new one. As before, the facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic under consideration. The facilitator's role is still to guide the group's inquiry.
- Establish a method of documenting the group's discussions and ideas.
- Decide how the group will review past proceedings and evaluate progress.
- Discuss expectations of each member related to the group process.
- Decide on meeting times/places. The group can meet anywhere at any time that is agreeable to all members.
- Establish rules for ensuring a comfortable, respectful, and nurturing environment where all viewpoints are heard.
- Remember that the purpose of the group is to engage in serious professional dialogue in a relaxed setting.

"In good conversation parties don't speak to the words, but to the meanings of each other."
-Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Social Aims," Letters and Social Aims, 1876

CHOOSING THE FACILITATOR

Decide who will be the facilitator/convener for this *Learning Circle.* The group **must** have a facilitator. The main duties of the facilitator are:

- Help group in determining ground rules so everyone will feel heard and valued as an important member of the group
- Facilitate decisions regarding meeting dates/times/locations
- Set up procedures for who will be responsible for what
- Lead the discussion regarding the group's goals and possible outcomes including products and/or projects
- Determine a way for all group members to be reminded of meeting dates/times/locations/responsibilities.

Fill out the Facilitator Guide (below) and include it with your completed packet. Groups without a facilitator are seldom successful.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

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Name of facilitator: _____
Email address: _____

Ground rules for group discussions
What should each member do to make the group experience positive and productive?

Examples:

Come to the discussion prepared by having read the week's reading. Make sure electronic devices are set to silent. Please record meeting dates/times.

As the facilitator, you might want to vary the meeting places. Many groups like to meet over coffee, at a park or at a member's home. There is no rule that says you can't make the experience enjoyable!

ASSIGNMENTS

This course requires completion of six assignments. Each assignment will be explained in detail.

Assignment #1	Professional Reading (Choose a Text That Meets the Needs of the Group and the Project)
Assignment #2	The Learning Circle Journal
Assignment #3	The Problem Statement (Please discuss this information in your journal)
Assignment #4	Data Collection (Discuss this process in your journal also)
Assignment #5	Results and Final Thoughts (Share in journal and hopefully with colleagues)
Assignment #6	End of Course Reflections

Assignment #1 - Professional Reading

For this course you should choose a book(s) related to the same topic as your last Learning Circle book choice. This new book should help further your knowledge of that topic. Often, a group realizes that they need more information about a particular strategy or item related to their original question. The book you choose for this course should help answer questions that arose during the last course or should contribute information that will make your Action Plan stronger.

NOTE: **For this course you need to read a total of 300 pages.** The focus is not so much on existing information as on creating new research. You may choose books and articles related to:

- Your Topic
- Action Research
- Learning Circles

See Resources for ideas

PLEASE EMAIL ME YOUR BOOK CHOICE BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE COURSEWORK.

Assignment #2 - The Learning Circle Journal

You will again use the Learning Circle Journal for documenting your work as well as recording your reflections. Each group member must complete a separate journal and log a minimum of 45 hrs. to receive credit for this course.

You may not include time spent on regular *classroom activities for which you are already compensated.*

Create your journal using the format in the example. **Begin by writing the group goals for the course at the top of your journal.** A sample mini journal (including goals) is provided.

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Creating a Table Using the Computer
You may use any software program to create a table as long as it is compatible with Microsoft Word. If you use Word, choose the "Table" option, then choose "Insert." Choose "4" for the number of columns. You can start with "4" for the rows also, but will add rows as you go. To add/delete rows go to "Table", then "Insert" or "Delete" and choose the appropriate action. If you want to add another row, put your cursor in the last row of your table and choose "Rows Below."

The sections will expand as you type. The columns can be made wider by using the cursor to drag the lines. Here is an example of the required categories and how the table will look when completed.

The Learning Circle Journal - An Example
GROUP GOALS

1. Explore effective ways to integrate the arts into the current reading program at the K-3 grade levels at Greenville Elementary.
2. Develop an Action Plan based on our research, reading, discussion, and experience

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY	REFLECTION
Month/Day/Year	1 hr.	Re-read the steps in the Action Research process. Talked about how we could frame our question so it could be tested.	In our previous LC course we studied the relationship between movement and learning. Now we want to see if movement can benefit our unique student population.
Month/Day/Year	1 ½ hrs.	Our group met at Starbucks after school.	We had a lively discussion about how we could best test our hypothesis, which is that adding more movement into our curriculum would improve student learning.

Total: 2.5 hours
Note: At the end of your journal, total your hours (at least 45) and enter them at the end of the journal.

Assignment #3 - Refine Your Question into a Problem Statement (Discuss in your journal)

In the previous course, you started with a Focusing Question that would guide your learning and discussion related to a perceived area of need. Your final product was an Action Plan that you may or may not have tried

to implement. In this course, you will take your inquiry to a new level by revisiting both your Focusing Question and your Action Plan from the first course with the purpose of clearly defining what it is you'd like to implement and test in this course.

This process is easier than you might imagine and once you begin thinking in terms of what can be actually shown to be true (or not) in your situation the more discriminating you will be in what you decide to do in your classroom. You will be able to use this method to really know if your "hunches" are correct. You will have much more control over what you teach since your teaching strategies will be based on real evidence collected by you and your colleagues.

After you determined the Focusing Question for the previous class, your group then read a book that hopefully contained strategies that addressed that question. In addition, you and the group discussed the pros and cons of the strategies in the book and came to some conclusions as to whether or not those strategies would work in your current situation. You wrote a group Action Plan in answer to your question that was based on the book and your discussions.

In this assignment you will write a paragraph that describes what you would like to test based on your experiences and research from the first course. According to Dr. Richard Sagor in his booklet published by ASCD, How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research, this paragraph, called the Problem Statement should answer the following questions:

1. **Who is affected?**
2. **Who or what is suspected of causing the problem?**
3. **What kind of problem is it?**
4. **What is the goal for improvement?**
5. **What do we propose to do about it?**

No doubt, your group has already answered many of these questions so writing a summary paragraph should not be too difficult. For clarity, put a number in the sentence in your paragraph that answers each question. The Problem Statement, like the Focusing Question it's based on a problem the group can do something about, cares deeply about, and is important to the group.

Here's an example of a Problem Statement based on an actual project submitted by a teacher researcher:

> One of Ms. Smith's high school English classes has difficulty remaining on task during scripted reading lessons. She believes this behavior is affecting their learning as well as her peace of mind **(1. The students and teacher are affected by the off-task behavior).** Ms. Smith believes the seating arrangement may be a factor in this behavior **(2. This sentence describes what is suspected of causing the problem).** Off task behavior includes things like talking, sleeping, fidgeting, and making disruptive noises **(3. This sentence clearly states the specifics of the problem.)** Ms. Smith plans to change the seating arrangement in the hope that students will spend more time on task and less time fooling around **(4. This is the goal for improvement).** Students in this class are currently sitting close together but the room is large enough to allow the teacher to place an empty desk between each student. In changing the seating arrangement in this manner, Ms. Smith hopes on-task behaviors will improve **(5. This sentence describes what it is the researcher is planning to try that could make a difference).**

Remember the Problem Statement is based on your original Focusing Question and your reading and discussion from the last class. A Problem Statement such as this would require that Ms. Smith's group had read and discussed issues related to off-task behavior and seating arrangements. Obviously, many other factors could cause this behavior including the curriculum, teaching style, or amount of sleep the students had the night before. But testing the seating arrangement will be useful and possibly eliminate one of the causes of

the unwanted behavior. **Revisit your *Action Plan* and see if it can be refined to include the five elements in a *Problem Statement (as listed above).***

Assignment #4 - Data Collection

Explain how you collected your data. Include a couple of examples (survey questions, interview answers, test results, etc.) Discuss this process in your journal.

The Problem Statement is like your compass. It will help you decide how to gather data to test your theory. Remember you want to find out if your intervention really works. There are many ways to collect data that can help you decide if your idea for action is effective. Data can come from many places including:

1. Parents
2. Students
3. Other teachers
4. Observations by group members
5. Written observations by teacher/instructor
6. Video recordings
7. Standardized or other forms of both formal and informal assessment
8. Checklists
9. Surveys given to students, parents, other teachers
10. Photographs
11. Cum folders
12. Portfolios

It's always best to use more than one method of collecting data. Action researchers suggest that you use at least three different sources or kinds of data as well as three different perspectives. This is called triangulation and gives you greater certainty that you have reached the right conclusion. You might use student portfolios, a checklist, and a questionnaire for your three sources and you might collect data from students, colleagues, and parents to get different perspectives on the problem. If possible, video a lesson, teaching intervention, or strategy to help verify your data.

In the case of Ms. Smith, her sources included written observations by herself and a member of her Learning Circle group, a student questionnaire, test results comparing student work on several tests both before and after the new seating arrangement. Ms. Smith's sources were observations, questionnaires, and test results. She also looked at the problem from the perspective of the teacher (herself), students, and her Learning Circle colleagues.

About Permission:
If you are interviewing or videotaping students, you should have a consent form signed by parents before you begin your research. Explain what you plan to accomplish in your research and what tools you will use to collect data. Invite parents to call if they need more information. Make sure you have a signed consent form from each parent. If a parent does not want his/her child involved in the project, have an alternate plan for that student. Even if your questionnaires are to be anonymous, it's best to let parents know what you are doing ahead of time. ***Make sure your administrator is aware of your project. Most administrators will be supportive and curious to know the results of your inquiry.***

Assignment #5 - Results and Sharing. (Include a discussion in your journal.)

This is the interesting part. You may confirm that what you thought would happen did indeed happen. You may also find out that what you thought would happen didn't happen or you may find out that something entirely unexpected happened. In the case of Ms. Smith, off task behavior did indeed drop significantly with the new seating arrangement—but so did student enjoyment and enthusiasm. The result was so impressive that Ms. Smith decided that she'd have to come up with another solution or live with some amount of off task behavior. She figured she'd rather have the enthusiasm.

"The test of real and vigorous thinking, the thinking which ascertains truths instead of dreaming dreams, is a successful application to practice."

-John Stuart Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, 3, 1861

As a group, analyze the data you've collected and see what logical conclusions you can draw. Did you guess correctly about the outcome? Why or why not? "Failure" gives you just as much useful information as "success." Remember Ms. Smith's bored and off task English class? She learned that although her intervention was effective as far as disruptive behavior was concerned, the intervention had an unexpected consequence of decreasing student engagement. She realized that she valued the enthusiasm of the class more than she'd thought and modified her teaching to include more engaging, collaborative assignments. The discussion of your project should be a minimum of a half page.

Please share your findings with interested colleagues! Where and with whom you share depends on the scope and type of research you conducted. If possible, include reactions to your findings from others in your write up.

Assignment #6 - End of Course Reflections

Please reflect on your Learning Circle experience, using the questions below as a guide. Your End of Course Reflections should be approximately 1 page (typed, 12-point font, double-spaced) and submitted with your coursework.

Group members must do this assignment ***individually,*** since each person will have experienced the course differently.

Reflection Questions

1. How was this Learning Circle successful in meeting the goals of the group? If you felt the group did not meet the goals, explain why you think this occurred.
2. What, if anything, would you change if you were to be part of a Learning Circle group again? What additional information would you have found useful related to the topic?
3. How has the book(s) and discussion changed or strengthened my professional practice? What am I doing differently?
4. How has working with a Learning Circle changed my teaching or learning? My relationship with colleagues? My relationship with students?

LEARNING CIRCLES RUBRIC

The instructor who reviews your work will use the rubric below to assign points that will determine your grade for this course. ***Please fill in the top portion of this form making sure all information is correct.***

Name: _____ ID Number: _____
Course Title_____Course Number: _____

____ TITLE PAGE

2—Includes all requested information (see syllabus)
1—Includes most information
0—Significant information is missing

____ THE FACILITATOR

4—Facilitator Worksheet is complete including meeting dates/times
2—A facilitator was chosen but records were incomplete
0—Facilitator Worksheet not included or no record of facilitator, ground rules or meeting times

____ QUESTIONS AND GOALS

4—Question relates to group goals. Goals are meaningful and clearly stated. Question and goals included in Learning Circle Journal
2—Question and/or goals are adequate but may lack focus, relevance, or value to education 0—Question and/or goals not stated

____ LEARNING CIRCLE JOURNAL

6—Journal contains an adequate number of hours, is neat and organized. Reflections are relevant to course topic
4—Journal contains most of the recommended hours, is readable and shows effort towards effective reflection
0—Journal not included, incomplete, or unreadable

____ ACTION PLAN

6—Action Plan Worksheet is complete and well-organized. Plan based on research and reflection and all questions are clearly answered.
4—Action Plan Worksheet is adequate, based on some research and reflection. Needs additional resources/organization.
0—Action Plan Worksheet incomplete or not included

____ REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS

4—Reflection assignments show ability to accurately assess learning related to course goals and assignments
2—Reflection paper shows some awareness of learning and course goals
0—Reflection paper not included or incomplete

____ OVERALL QUALITY OF COMPLETED WORK

2—Participant follows the syllabus and presents materials professionally using correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
1—Presentation of materials is adequate but needs more attention to grammar, punctuation, spelling and/or organization
0—Materials are difficult to read or poorly organized

____ TOTAL

Instructor Comments:

Letter Grade: A= 28 - 26 pts. B=25 - 23 pts. C=22 - 20 pts. D=19 - 17 pts**.** (P/NP only if requested in advance)

Instructor Signature: _____ Date: _____

RESOURCES

Falk, Beverly and Megan Blumenreich. (2005). ***The Power of Questions: A Guide to Teacher and Student Research.*** Heinemann. This book shows teachers how to evaluate their teaching practices and have a better understanding about their students by using inquiry and reflection.

Efrat, Sara and Ruth Ravid. (2013) ***Action Research in Education: A Practical Guide.*** Guildford Press. This book is a highly recommended guide for the process of Action Research.

Meyers, Ellen and Francis Rust. (2003). ***Taking Action with Teacher Research.*** Heinemann. This book is written for teachers at all grade levels from beginner to veteran. It addresses how teachers can examine the many problems they face in the classroom and shows how to ask the right questions, collect, and use the data to effect change.

Mills, Geoffrey. (2017). ***Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher (6th Edition).*** Prentice Hall. This book outlines the steps necessary to do action research. It has numerous illustrations on the subject including on- line resources. It covers the entire writing process through publication and discusses the use of computers in data analysis plus the importance of data collection.

Note: These are just a few of the many books on Action Research that could be helpful in your inquiry. I recommend that you become familiar with at least one.