Peer Learning Circle (PLC)
Training Materials

May 30, 2014
(Revised January 26, 2015)

By: Kim Stokely,
kim@kimstokely.org
Facilitation Basics

Set Up
The first facilitator will sign up for a conference dial-in number, Meeting ID and Host Code with www.startmeeting.com or Google Hangout, which works better for people talking between countries. It takes less than a minute to sign up. After signing up, the first facilitator will share this information with the rest of his/her PLC and everyone in the circle should record this information in their address book to use for future PLC calls.

Monthly
Everyone in the group takes responsibility for making the PLC work, as intended, but each month one participant will volunteer to be the Facilitator for that session. It may be helpful to figure out the rotation schedule at the first session, taking into account people’s availability, or to determine that responsibility at the close of each session.

The Facilitator in charge will:

• Send reminder emails to participants of the date and time of the upcoming PLC call and the dial-in number and Meeting ID 5-7 days prior the session.
• Initiate the 2-hour PLC session by dialing in and entering the Host Code a couple minutes before the session start time.
• Keep the session running on time by tracking time according to the agenda.
• At closing remind the group of the date and time for the next PLC session and who will be the Facilitator for the next session.
• Email Kim Stokely (kim@kimstokely.org) within 2 days of your PLC session and let her know how it went, any challenges you and/or the group faced, any questions that came up about process, and anything else you think she should know in her goal to assure that these PLC’s are serving participants and for process improvement.

Tips:
• Some participants send out a poem or reading in advance when it is their turn to facilitate. They then use the poem or reading to start the meeting and help people become present. Participants have commented that this helps them be more prepared for the PLC session.
• Use Doodle http://doodle.com for help with scheduling as needed.
Peer Learning Circle: Participant Form

My objective for this session: *Question/ action/ issue I want to briefly present to my learning circle so they can help further my intentions for learning.*

What may be most helpful to receive from my fellow participants?

___ open honest questions ___ sharing of resources (Includes brainstorming, sharing teaching stories, and sharing specific resources.)

Things I learned in this session that I want to remember and use:

Actions I will take in the next month:
Preparing for Sessions

In advance of each session, you should note your learning goal for the session and desired method of support on the top half of your *Peer Learning Circle Participant Form*.

You should come to each session with an objective or “learning goal” – a question or priority or issue you want to get help with. You should also come with a plan for how you want to get support from your fellow circle members, choosing from one or more of the following:

- **Open Honest Questions** – helps you tap into your own resourcefulness and gain clarity.
- **Resource Sharing** – helps you discover other resources to support you in expanding your possibilities. Sharing resources typically takes the form of either brainstorming or the sharing of teaching stories. *Brainstorming* – helps the presenter surface other ideas and approaches, without judgment. *Sharing teaching stories* helps the presenter hear the wisdom of others who have experience in similar situations. *Sharing resources* also gives us a chance to share specific resources that might be helpful.

Tips:
- PLC participants have found it helpful to send out their issue or goal ahead of time so that other members of the group can be considering it before hand.
- At each PLC, presenters can specify whether they would welcome follow-up communications regarding their issue such as further resource sharing.
- Following the PLC, some groups have set up Drop Box for sharing third things, information, and resources. You can also email to each other.

Please see handout on *Resource Sharing*.

Here are some ideas to get you thinking about how you might use your time:

- I’m not doing as much C&R facilitation as I want to. I’d like to use my session to receive HONEST OPEN QUESTIONS that will help me explore the obstacles.
- I would like to bring C&R work to a certain audience. I’d like RESOURCE SHARING that would help me think about process ideas in my goal of lifting up the topic of self-care among these people. OR I’d like to receive HONEST OPEN QUESTIONS to explore my goals for the group, and how I might bring this work to life.
- I have a session I’m facilitating next month, and I’d like to use RESOURCE SHARING to help get ideas for how I might approach that session.
- I’d like to receive HONEST OPEN QUESTIONS to help me explore how I might use the touchstones to further my role as leader or parent.
- I’m struggling to find the right balance in sharing my own story and modeling what I’m asking others to do with taking up too much air-time. How do I know what the sweet spot is? I’d like to use RESOURCE SHARING to hear stories of how some of you have dealt with that question.
• I find it hard to figure out what the arc of a retreat or program should be - how the parts connect to each other. I'd like some RESOURCES & QUESTIONS to help me think through this issue.

• Marketing and recruitment are not my strong suits. I'd appreciate some resource RESOURCE SHARING from others’ experience. Or I'd like some HONEST OPEN QUESTIONS to explore my resistance to “selling” my offerings.
Resource Sharing

Resource Sharing helps the presenter discover other resources to support them in expanding their possibilities. Sharing resources typically takes the form of either brainstorming, sharing of specific resources, or the sharing of teaching stories. We are all practiced in asking honest, open questions, but many of us are not so practiced in the practice of resource sharing. Here are tips and structures for resource sharing.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming was designed for developing creative ideas and solutions to problems. There are four general rules for brainstorming:

- **Focus on quantity**: This rule is a means of enhancing divergent production, aiming to facilitate problem solving through the maxim *quantity breeds quality*. The assumption is that the greater the number of ideas generated, the greater the chance of producing a radical and effective solution.

- **Withhold criticism**: In brainstorming, criticism of ideas generated should be put 'on hold'. Instead, participants should focus on extending or adding to ideas, reserving criticism for a later 'critical stage' of the process. By suspending judgment, participants will feel free to generate unusual ideas.

- **Welcome unusual ideas**: To get a good and long list of ideas, unusual ideas are welcomed. They can be generated by looking from new perspectives and suspending assumptions. These new ways of thinking may provide better solutions.

- **Combine and improve ideas**: Good ideas may be combined to form a single better good idea, as suggested by the slogan "1+1=3". It is believed to stimulate the building of ideas by a process of association.

Sharing of Teaching Stories

*Sharing of teaching stories* helps the presenter hear the wisdom of others who have experience in similar situations. Stories should be kept brief and to the point. Teaching stories should have a specific teaching or sharing of wisdom as their focus. They might include the sharing of a similar experience, but that is not their point. Their point is the sharing of the teaching that comes through from the sharing of the story.

Sharing of Specific Resources

We have the opportunity to share specific resources. This might be the title of a book, a video, or a person to talk to. If sharing the resource will be time consuming for any reason, then mention the resource and send out a reference to the resource to the circle through email. Along with sharing the resource, you will most likely want to share the purpose or relevance of the resource to the presenter’s issue. Make sure to keep this brief and to the point.
Sample Session Agenda

The Facilitator in charge of this session will:

1) Read out loud our Peer Learning Circle Ground Rules below and the highlights of Courage & Renewal Touchstones: (Some groups begin with a moment of silence, a poem, or a reading.)

   a) Participate fully in this session as possible.
   b) Follow the C&R Touchstones.
   c) Communicate your needs. If your needs are not being met, say so.
   d) Respect other members’ needs, and the way they desire to receive support.
   e) Start on time and end on time, including taking no more than the prescribed time during the opening check-in as well as when you are the presenter.
   f) Assure confidentiality.
   g) Manage your time slot, and come to the session clear about what kind of support you want. Help your Peer Learning Circle to help you.
   h) All contributions are honored.

2) Check-in – opportunity to bring self fully into the session. Briefly check in (up to a minute or so) and update the group about something in their work and lives that they want to share.

3) Each circle can decide on some sort of grounding activity to bring everyone to a more grounded and present state. Everyone focusing on their breathing and taking a few deep breaths as they become present on the call is a simple way to do this.

4) Review Guidelines for supporting each other in our Peer Learning Circles:

   a) Presenter of Issue
      i) Explain your objective/learning goal in no more than 2-3 minutes.
      ii) Be brief in your descriptions and answers.
      iii) Explain your objective/learning goal in terms of the here-and-now/current.
      iv) Describe your feelings about your learning goal, when applicable.
      v) Use “I” statements as much as possible in your explanations.
      vi) Be clear about the type of support you want: honest, open questions or resource sharing.

   b) Supporting Others
      i) Listen closely, focusing on presenter’s objective/learning goal.
      ii) Be concise.
      iii) Ask useful questions about the presenter’s perspectives, assumptions, actions, etc.
      iv) Limit advice and discussion.
      v) Help the presenter come to specific actions and learning, where applicable.

      Towards the end of the 15-minute session, participants might consider asking questions that can help the presenter come to specific learnings and actions they can take to move things forward (i.e. “What is one thing you might do in the coming weeks to bring this to reality?”)
vi) Intervene if this session gets off track. A friendly way to do this is to say, “We have (x-number) minutes left. Where would you like to go from here?”

5) Managing Time Slots

   a) Each person gets the same amount of time to be helped in each meeting.
   b) Ask for a volunteer to go first and decide on the order you will go in.
   c) The presenter describes their objective/learning goal in no more than 2-3 minutes, and asks for the kind of support they want during their time slot (i.e. questions or sharing resources)
   d) It works best when each member actively supports the presenter during the presenter’s time slot.
   e) At about 2 minutes before the end of a presenter’s session, the facilitator should quietly inform the circle that there are 2 minutes left. As a presenter’s session approaches 15 minutes, the facilitator should try to find a good time (before another question is asked) to say that time is up, and invite the group into a minute of silence when the presenter (and anyone else who wants to) can note down learnings and actions on the bottom half of their Monthly Participant Session Form.
   f) After the minute of silence, invite another volunteer to go next.
   g) When it’s time for the facilitator to be the presenter, someone else should agree to watch the time.

6) Closing

   a) Capture Actions & Learnings - Invite each person to continue filling out the sections in the session form provided in response to “Things I learned in this session that I want to remember and use” and “Actions I will take prior to our next session.”
   b) Share Learnings Out Loud – Ask the group if anyone wants to share any of their learnings from today’s session.
   c) Confirm the next session’s date and time and invite someone to commit to facilitate that session.
   d) Closing Circle – Provide space for each participant (if they choose) to articulate one brief appreciation for the time they have just spent together.
Peer Learning Circle: Session Debrief Form

Immediately after each Peer Learning Circle meeting, the facilitator of the meeting should fill out this form and email it to Kim Stokely at kim@kimstokely.org so your circle and others can benefit from your experience. Thank you.

Date of Meeting:

Who participated in your PLC meeting/call? Who could not?

What kinds of issues/questions did participants use their time for? (Do not share specific content. Just give general categories of questions and issues, such as management, relationships, transition, etc.)

What worked well in your session?

What didn’t work well in your session?

If you had it to do over again, how might you have facilitated this Circle differently?

Who is the facilitator for the next PLC meeting? What is your Circle’s next meeting date?

Anything else you want to share with Kim about your PLC and this particular session?