

# Learning Circle Teacher Guide



**GLOBAL TEENAGER PROJECT**

Original author: Margaret Riel

Adaptation: Lisette Gast, Bob Hofman, Neeltje Blommestein, Nathan Ducastel

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## **Welcome to the Global Teenager Project!**

Dear teachers.

Before you lies the teacher guide for the September 2003 Global Teenager Learning Circles. This teacher guide will explain to you what the Learning Circles are and how these Circles can help you integrate the use of email and Internet in your curriculum.

On behalf of the Global Teenager, a project of the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and our local partners, SchoolNet South Africa, World Links Program, Rescue Mission Ghana, Jamaica Computer Society Education Foundation, PassNet Consultants in Kenya, Amöba from Romania, WorldVision Zimbabwe, Schoolnet Uganda, RITSEC in Egypt, ICT&E in the Netherlands, For the Green Latvia, Foundation Ayni in Bolivia, iEARN Macedonia and iEARN Ukraine we would like to welcome you to the Global Teenager Project. Together, the above-mentioned organisations have worked to set up a network that links students all over the world in an online community.

Learning Circles are highly interactive, project-based exchange programme among a large number of schools located throughout the world. Each session is 10 weeks. During these weeks the circle is active, Ebenezer and Sithabile will be on-line as facilitators to guide, assist and answer possible questions in the English Learning Circles. At the same time, Issa will be active as the facilitator for the French Learning Circles. Together, we want to stress that joining a Learning Circle means a commitment! If you follow the few rules that are explained in this guide and actively participate during the 10 weeks of this program, you'll be sure to experience a new way of learning.

We aim to make your participation in the Global Teenager Project as useful as possible. That is why we give you the opportunity to develop additional projects as well. Perhaps you would like to do a videoconference with a school in another country, or build a website with several students from around the world. Your initiatives get space to grow within the Global Teenager Project!

Your comments and suggestions are welcome at all time at: [globalteenager@iicd.org](mailto:globalteenager@iicd.org).

Sincere greetings

Neeltje Blommestein & Nathan Ducastel  
Global Teenager projectmanagers

Ebenezer Malcolm & Sithabile Urenje & Issa Boro  
Learning Circle facilitators

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## **Introduction of the 'Learning Circle '**

Welcome to a new way of enriching classroom learning! During the ten weeks you will learn how to use virtual communications to enhance your curriculum activities and motivate learning. The interaction between you and the other participants in your Learning Circle will be something you help to create. It will be a team effort resulting from the co-operation between teachers and students who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to interact. We call these teams "Learning Circles."

In this guide we use the word "class" to refer to all of the students at your school who will be participating in the Global Teenager Learning Circles. While the norm may be one teacher with a class of 30 students, in some schools the "class" will be a computer club, or a set of students drawn from different classes with a resource teacher, or a small number of classes taught by the same teacher (for example, in a computer lab).

After five years of experience we, all the GTP coordinators together, have decided to create two kinds of Learning Circles. Over the past five years the amount of schools, which have participated to the Learning Circles of the Global Teenager Project, has increased. Furthermore lots of schools have participated several times and have really implemented the Learning Circles in their school curriculum. This is the reason why we have decided to create a Basic and an Advanced Learning Circle.

Both circles share the same common characteristics and require also the same commitment. The Advanced Learning Circle will be more focussed on extended research skills and international collaboration and requires local community and expert involvement.

## *Overview of Global Teenager Project 'Learning Circle' Activities*

### **Week 00**

Basic and @vanced:

This very first week is used to test all **technical** aspects like your Learning Circles e-mailadres, accessibility to the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)) on your school. You will receive your Learning Circle email address (e.g. LC-cultmarch2003@dgroups.org), your login & password to the Virtual Campus and your CLASSCODE. This is the week to sort things out with your computer teacher or GTP Country Coordinator, with the help of the facilitator.

### **Week 0**

Basic and @vanced:

Getting ready; Preparing for the Learning Circle in the class with the students.

### **Week 1**

Basic and @vanced:

Learning Circle partners meet each other by a Teacher-Chat and by exchanging Teachers and Class Letters.

### **Weeks 2-3**

Basic and @vanced:

Each class sponsors one question for the Learning Circle.

@vanced:

There is a need for a strong link with ongoing classroom activities to provide a context for your students. The class sponsors a question, which invites the other participants to do research in their own environment and local community.

### **Weeks 4-5-6**

Basic and @vanced:

Students respond to all of the questions in the Learning Circle.

@vanced::

In responding to all the questions the students have to consult different resources and in their answers make references to the different sources used. There will be a high level of interactivity and a higher frequency of communication. The sending of emails back and forth regarding the questions is highly encouraged.

### **Weeks 7-8-9**

Basic and @vanced:

Students prepare a summary of the responses to their sponsored question for the 'Circle Publication'. Send summary to Learning Circle partners.

@vanced:

Students prepare a digital presentation of their own choice (for. i. a website, a PowerPoint-presentation, an audio-video-presentation). The presentation will be a publication which is based upon the summary and which has to show a higher level of in-dept analysis of the results.

### **Weeks 10**

Closing the Learning Circle.

## **Learning Circle Goals**

The purpose of this guide is to establish some common goals, to share ideas and suggestions from other teachers, and to support you in your teaching and learning. Each chapter of this guide describes one phase of the Circle.

The technology plays an essential role in facilitating the exchanges on the Learning Circle, but it is not the focus of the activity. Students will learn about the technology as they use it to work on their Learning Circle activities.

### The Global Teenager Learning Circle: Goals for Teachers and Students

#### Share Individual, Regional, and Cultural Perspectives

- Promote intercultural and regional understanding and sensitivity
- Understand how regions are similar and different
- Explore issues of national and global significance

#### Foster Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Skills

- Engage students in thoughtful choice of a question for the Learning Circle
- Involve students in research as they respond to questions
- Develop students' ability to collect, interpret and present information to others
- Improve map reading skills as students locate the Circle schools

#### Enhance Communication Skills

- Encourage students to use writing to share ideas with others
- Provide opportunities to read, evaluate, and edit the work of others
- Promote writing across the curriculum

#### Develop Co-operative and Collaborative Work Strategies

- Learn to work as members of a team with peers in other places
- Understand responsibilities that come with group participation
- learn how to work co-operatively with partners in distant locations.

#### Learn to Use Telecommunications Technology

- Understand how computers are used to exchange information
- Gain experience in working with computers
- Be aware of 'Netiquette' in electronic communication

## **Learning Circle Tasks**

Participating in the Global Teenager Learning Circle can be a fun and exciting way for students and teachers to learn together by working on a common task: to gain, process and present information.

During the circle students are both working on their own and each other's questions. Receiving responses to your own question and responding to others to make the project more valuable.

As the themes of the Learning Circle are curriculum based, ICT skills and knowledge aspects are integrated in the everyday learning and teaching. So use ICT not as a primary goal but subservient to the educational process.

Computers and computer networking are very efficient tools for motivating learning and publishing student work. However, they will never replace teachers and the valuable role teachers play in organising educational experiences.

In Learning Circles, teachers and students share in the excitement of exchanging ideas and information with people in distant locations through telecommunications. Students share in the teacher's role when teachers and students work as a team to plan activities for the Learning Circle.

The teacher becomes a role model of the active learner by joining the students as a learner in the Learning Circle activities. When teachers and students from different places work side by side to create a publication, sharing their unique visions of the world, everyone acquires a new level of understanding of the rich diversity in our modern world.

The Global Teenager Learning Circle is a network of human resources. This network provides a unique way to explore and understand one's own life by developing a richer understanding of the places and perspectives of others. By working co-operatively in Learning Circle teams, students learn new skills for their future in a global community.

### **Role of the Facilitator**

The facilitators are there to guide you through the Learning Circle phases. Mr. Ebenezer Malcolm from Ghana, Mrs. Sithabile Urenje will facilitate the English Learning Circles. Mr. Issa Boro will facilitate the French Learning Circles. The facilitators always welcome your questions and are willing to help you and your class to get through the Learning Circle phases. They will send News messages weekly to all the Circles. In these messages you can find the latest information and reminders to keep you on track. They will also include information regarding the scheduled chat session.

The facilitators will also send you Updates weekly. In these Updates you can find information on how you and your partner schools are doing. You can clearly see which schools have send their messages and sometimes which schools are lacking behind.

### **Student Chat and Personal Messages**

It's important to remember that the message exchange via the Learning Circle occurs among classrooms. However, personal contact is very stimulating and adds to the better final result. To stimulate personal contact in **week 2 a scheduled online chatsession** between students will take place. Please make sure that your students are able to enjoy such an exciting session. Besides this organised chatsession, the opportunity to chat online with one or more partner classes is always present, because **the chatroom is always open!** To schedule a time to chat with partner classes, your class can write a message to the Circle to propose a chat. Hopefully other classes will respond and a chat-appointment can be made.

Another way to stimulate personal contact is, as a teacher, to encourage students to exchange personal email addresses in the Welcome message of your class. Students can then write personal letters to each other, outside the Learning Circle. (Do keep in mind, not every students might have access to an individual E-mail address.)

## **Phase 1      Getting ready**

### **Week 00: Technical preparations**

This very first week is used to test all **technical** aspects like your Learning Circles e-mailadres, accessibility to the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)) on your school. You will receive your Learning Circle email address (e.g. LC-envmarch2003@dgroups.org), your login & password to the Virtual Campus and your CLASSCODE. This is the week to sort things out with your computer teacher or GTP Country Coordinator, with the help of the facilitator.

You will also receive a listing the schools which have been assigned to your Learning Circle with their classcodes. It is a good idea to make a print copy of this message and save for future reference. You may want to post it in your classroom for your students as well.

### **Week 0: Preparing for the Learning Circle**

It is important to set aside some time before the beginning of the Learning Circle for you and your students to become familiar with the program and to plan for your interaction.

Both the introduction workshop, as this guide are meant to give you a clear view on the Learning Circle process. To realise the maximum educational benefit from your ten-week period of Learning Circle, you will need to be ready to begin interacting with the other schools as soon as the Circle opens. Getting ready involves some planning by both the teacher and the students.

### **Teacher Preparation**

You and your students will need to work closely with your Learning Circle partners. You can prepare for this interaction by reading this guide carefully so that you are ready to begin on the first day. Part of the excitement of working in a Learning Circle is that it is an open learning environment created by the group. No one can predict exactly what questions you and your students will be exploring over the next few weeks. Your learning experience evolves from the co-operative work of all.

A little bit of uncertainty is what makes the educational experience so exciting. but there is also a strong need for commitment to send messages regularly. You will see how important this is the first time your students send a message. They will ask you when they should expect a response. You tell them a few days or a week, and they will wait. But if there is no reply after this time, they will be very disappointed. So you need to be careful about the predictions you make and recognise that others will be counting on you and your students to respond.

**Try to set a regular schedule for checking and sending mail and share this information with your partners**

Please refer to the Learning Circle Timeline and list the opening day on your calendar. You may also want to take a few minutes now to write the dates of each of the Learning Circle phases into your lesson planning book. You will need to plan some time for each of the phases of the Learning Circle. This is a good time to make a note of any school holiday or other times that you will be away from computer communication. You will want to share this information with others in your Learning Circle. You may want to post the Global Teenager Timeline near the computer so that you and your students can refer to it as you begin working on the Learning Network.

### **Student Preparation**

Your students also need to get ready for this new learning experience. Now is a good time to discuss their expectations about similarities and differences among people in different locations. A student letter (available on the Virtual Campus) introduces the Learning Circles to students. You may find it useful to make copies of this letter to give to your students or post it where your students can read it.

Learning to work in teams is an important work skill. Help your students to understand that others are depending on them and they are depending on others. In any team, there is usually a weak link, someone who is unable to do as much as others had hoped. So tell your students that they will be working cooperatively with student teams in distant locations to work in the Global Teenager project. Encourage your students to take their roles seriously as the information they provide to the Circle will represent themselves, their school, and their community. Everyone is both teacher and learner in the Learning Circles.

### Student to Student Messages

Your students will be learning a great deal about students in other locations from their messages, but the form of communication in the Learning Circle conference is not personal letters between two students. With 150 to 300 students in a Learning Circle, it is very difficult to match up students for this type of exchange. More importantly, research has shown that this type of exchange exacts a high cost in teaching, planning, and classroom time, returning only the most limited educational benefits to the students.

Students who want pen or computer pals can list their postal or email addresses and a few words about themselves in a Student Welcome Message. However, please do not send message meant for a single person to the Learning Circle email address (dgroup). The Learning Circle is an Electronic Classroom and messages in this conference are addressed to everyone in the Circle. If a student wants to send a message to another student at one of the schools, this message should be sent to the school account rather than the Learning Circle email address (dgroup).

### Plan Ahead

If everyone is ready to get started when the Learning Circle opens, there will be plenty of time for some very exciting interaction. One way to plan ahead is to have your students work on their Class Letter before the Learning Circle opens. Instructions for writing the Class Letter are in the next chapter of this guide. Sending your Class Letter the first week is an excellent way to invite others to join in the fun!

If it is not possible for you to work according to the schedule described, please let the other people in your Learning Circle know your plans. But Remember: offers of help and humorous reminders of deadlines are ways of helping others meet their deadlines. Insults, demands and angry pleas are not as likely to increase group productivity. Helping students to monitor their social skills as well as their work on projects can be a very valuable education.

### Mail Management – Easily stored = Easily found!

Now is also the time to think about how you will store your messages. It is very important to have a number of blank disks available as it does not take long to fill a disk with messages.

Once you begin work on the Learning Circle, you may be receiving **a lot of weekly messages** and you will need to have a good system for storing and retrieving information that you receive in messages.

*Examples to store your messages!*

Folder School .. classcode ..	Folder: Teacher Letters
Folder School .. classcode ..	Folder: Student Letters

Folder School .. classcode ..	Folder: Sponsored Questions
Folder School .. classcode ..	Separate folders: For every school incoming answers
Folder School .. classcode ..	Folder: summaries
Folder School .. classcode ..	Folder: saying goodbye message
Folder School .. classcode ..	
Folder School .. classcode ..	

### *Always use your Classcode*

During ten weeks several Global Teenager Learning Circles will operate simultaneously. Hundreds of emails in a couple of weeks. To help you and the facilitator keep easy track on these hundreds of emails on the Learning Circles, each school will receive a code from the facilitator. **Your classcode has to be used as the first word in the subject of every mail you send in your Learning Circle.**

A classcode is unique for a learning circle. So even if you joined an earlier Learning Circle you will receive a new classcode which you have to use!

### *Examples of how to use your classcode in the subject field*

Teacher Letter:

**Subject: HR3 Teacher letter de Breul Secondary School**

Class Letter:

**Subject: HR3 Class letter de Breul Secondary School**

Sponsored Question:

**Subject: HR3 Sponsored question by de Breul Secondary School**

Response to questions!

**Subject: HR3 de Breul SS answer to question from HR8 Madina Islamic School**

Summary:

**Subject: HR3 Summary from de Breul Sec School**

Goodbye Letter:

**Subject: HR3 Goodbye letter from de Breul Secondary School**

### *Attachments*

The Learning Circles are mainly based on low technology and low cost, so every school has the opportunity to join. Since some schools work with slow computers and low-bandwidth connections, downloading attachments can take too long and be too costly. So **PLEASE don NOT** use attachments while sending E-mail to the Learning Circle email address (dgroup). If you want to send pictures or graphics please send it to [globalteenager@iicd.org](mailto:globalteenager@iicd.org).

### **Getting Ready Check List**

You are well prepared for the opening of the Learning Circles when you have checked off each of the following steps:

#### **Getting Ready Checklist**

- Read this Teacher's Guide and recorded timeline dates in lesson plan book**
- Know how to send and receive messages**
- Explained the Learning Circle concept to your students**
- Created a plan for sending, storing,**



## **Phase 2      Opening the Learning Circle**

### **week 1 – 2**

The first thing you do when you enter a new group is presenting yourself. So the first Learning Circle activities are designed to get to know each other. Learning Circle interaction begins with the first CIRCLE NEWS from the facilitator welcoming you to the Global Teenager Learning Circle. Circle News on a weekly basis continues to provide direction and support for Circle Interaction and to carry special events across Circles. It is a bit like loudspeaker that reaches across classrooms with news and information.

The Global Teenager Learning Circle will be officially opened with a welcome message, send by the facilitator Ebenezer Malcolm, Sithabile Urenje or Issa Boro. This email will invites you, the teacher, to join the teacher-chat and to respond by sending a “Hello” message to the Learning Circle. By preparing your response ahead of time, you will be ready to send it when the Circle begins.

### **Teacher Chatsession**

To start the Learning Circles, all teachers are invited to join a two hour online teacher-chat. This exciting online meeting gives you the possibility to introduce yourself to your partner teachers and ask them all kinds of questions about themselves.

### **Teacher’s “Hello” Message**

Your “Hello” message will assure the other members of your Learning Circle that you are there and ready to communicate. Begin by telling something about yourself. Take some time with this first message as it will provide others with their “first impression” of you.

*Here are some ideas of what you might include in your first message:*

- Describe your experience or position in your school and the grade level of your students.
- Give some personal information about yourself.
- Describe the computer equipment you will be using.
- Indicate how often and on what days you will be checking for mail during the Global Teenager project. Information on how often you plan to be online is very important. It will help you and your partners plan as you learn to work together.

*Sample Teacher's "Hello" Messages, sent during the Global Teenagers Project Pilot project.*

Here is an example of a teacher's "Hello" message from a teacher in Queenstown, South Africa.

**From:** marialouw@xs4all.sa  
**To:** LC-hr1march2003@dgroups.org  
**Subject:** HR 2 teacher hello message

*MARIA LOUW SECONDARY SCHOOL, QUEENSTOWN*

Hi there Learning Circle partners!

This is Werner Newton Von Schaeffer making contact! Sorry for joining in late - we were connected to e-mail today - but ... rather late then never!  
I'm a 32-year-old Mathematics teacher for grades 11 and 12 at Maria Louw Secondary School in Queenstown, sunny South Africa. Here is a short self-portrait:

Hair: Black  
Eyes: Brown  
Height: 1,84m  
Weight: I think it's 82 kg  
Married to: Catherine, for 11 years  
Children: Winrich - 10 and Inge - 7  
Likes: My church work, computers and sport  
Dislikes: Vegetables and going to a doctor!

I look forward to learn more  
about you.  
Werner.

Please make a print copy of this list and save it for future reference. You may want to post it in your classroom for your students. Information about your partners may also be recorded on the "Learning Circle Attendance Sheet" available on the Virtual Campus. As you and your students receive the first messages from other locations, you can mark these dates on the attendance sheet.

You should send your "Hello" message as soon as possible after the opening of the Learning Circle. This assures your partners that you are online and ready to participate.

## **Class Letter**

The first student activity, the Class Letter, is designed to help you and your students learn more about your Learning Circle partners. You will have the names and locations of the other participants in your Circle, but it is unlikely that your students will know very much about the other places. They will be very curious. Help them understand that the people in the other classrooms are very eager to learn more about them, too.

The Class Letter introduces your students to their Learning Circle partners and lets everyone know that they are ready to participate. It is like the first day of school when everyone takes a bit of time to learn the names of their classmates. In the electronic Learning Circle classroom there are too many names to memorise, but it is exciting to learn who will be participating in each of the class teams. The Class Letter is the first opportunity for your students to ask informal questions and share information about themselves, their school, and their community with their Circle partners. Here are some ideas for what to include and how to structure the Class Letter, but encourage your students to develop their own style.

### *Student Introductions*

Students want to know how students in other locations are similar and different. Your students might want to include a list of class favourites or make a list of ways in which they think their lives are the same as students in other locations and ways that they think their lives are different. While it will be difficult to get to know students in all the locations by name, it is a good idea to include students' names in the letter.

### *School Description*

Students are eager to find out how schools in different locations compare with their own school. They are often interested in indicators of school size (number of students, classes at a grade level, number of classrooms), a general description of the school (number of buildings, recreation and sports facilities), markers of school spirit (flags, mascot, colours, songs), and information about special programs or rules. Perhaps your students will want to include a description of things they think make their school unique. If your school has a homepage: this is the time to mention it to your Learning Circle partners; on the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)) on the Gallery there is a special place for your class or school picture. Send it as an attachment to: [globalteenager@iicd.org](mailto:globalteenager@iicd.org).

### *Community Profile*

Students are also curious to learn more about the surrounding communities of their peers in other locations. Your students might want to include the size of your community and, if it is not a city, the distance to and size of the nearest city. Descriptions of the land (location, elevation, terrain, bodies of water) and its people (ethnicity, customs, values and attitudes, type of work) will help students appreciate the different communities represented in the Circle. Students might want to discuss with their parents how to describe the community to others and bring their parents' suggestions to school. Sharing this information from different families in a class discussion is likely to provide many good ideas for representing the diversity in your community. Older students might want to describe community issues or local social problems.

### *Sample Class Letter*

**From: breul@inter.net.nl**  
**To: LC-envmarch2003@dgroups.org**  
**Subject: student introduction letter from ENV5**

SCHOLENGEMEENSCHAP DE BREUL, ZEIST

How are you? We hope you all are well.

All right, let's start with an introduction! Our class (5th form) counts 27 students, 9 of which are boys and 18 of which are girls. We don't have school uniforms.

The average age in our class is 17. Our school is called 'De Breul' and there are about 1600 students at it.

Our classes are from 08:35 AM to 03:20 PM and take 50 minutes each. Our school week is from Monday to Friday. How long do your classes take? Everybody takes different subjects. Optional classes are for example: German, French, Math, Economics, Science, Physics, Geography, Latin, Greek and History. Dutch and one foreign language we must take.

'De Breul' is situated in Zeist, a little town in the centre of Holland, near Utrecht. Most people in our class are from Zeist, but some of us come from towns nearby like Odijk, Maarn and Soesterberg. We go to school by bike, by bus or by train.

Holland is a country where it rains a lot. Sometimes it is very nice weather, but the next day it may be gone. As we have a lot of pupils in our class, there are a lot of hobbies. Most students like sports such as hockey, tennis, volleyball and soccer. We don't have any school leagues, do you? Most of us have jobs in our spare time like babysitting, working in a supermarket, telemarketing.

We all like different styles of music. Popular styles of music in Holland are trance, R&B and rock. We also like to go out in the weekend.

A special thing about our class is the fact that we have several nationalities. Most of us are Dutch, but there are also people from Hong-Kong, France and Russia. They all speak Dutch. So, now you know us a little.

We hope that you like this letter and we hope to hear from you soon!

### *A Reminder...*

We use "class" to refer to all of the students at your location who are participating in Learning Circle. If you are involving more than one group of students in the Learning Circle, you can select a primary group and have them send the Class Letter. It is also possible to have different groups of students work together to send a single "school" letter. One group might work on the school description and another group could work on the community description.

### **Visualise the Learning Circles**

As you receive each of the Class Letters, you may want to save a copy on disk and print a copy for classroom use. To visualise this learning event it is great to send pictures or drawings to [globalteenager@iicd.org](mailto:globalteenager@iicd.org) (reminder: don NOT send attachments to the circle). They will be placed on the Gallery of the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)).

A bulletin board display is one effective way to visualise and share your Learning Circle experience with other students and teachers in the school and with parents and classroom visitors. Using a world map (or use the Maps available on the Virtual Campus) and the GTP logo, each of the partner classes can be displayed and a place can be identified to display the messages as they arrive from these different places.

When students begin receiving electronic mail from each of the classrooms, the messages can be printed and posted on the bulletin board. This display makes it possible for students in other classrooms to share in the excitement of the long distance exchanges.

### NICE IDEA: Use a Bulletin Board

As soon as you have received the introduction letters, take a worldmap and pinpoint all the places where your partners are situated!!



### Plan Ahead

The next step is to plan for the Learning Circle questions. Once you have completed your Class Letter, you and your class need to decide on which question you will be sponsoring as part of the Global Teenager project. If you already know the question, you are welcome to send it during the first week. This will provide a model for others to follow.

## **Opening Learning Circle Check List**

You are well prepared for the next phase of the Learning Circles when you have checked off each of the following steps:

### **Opening Learning Circle Checklist**

- Attended the Teacher chat**
- Using the Classcodes**
- Prepared and Sent Teachers 'Hello message'**
- Prepared and Sent Student 'Hello message'**
- Pinpointed on the map all the places of the partners**
- Stored and shared all incoming messages**

### **Phase 3        Sponsoring a Question for the Learning Circle**

#### **Week 3 - 4**

Now the real learning starts. In all Learning Circles, teachers are encouraged to extend classroom lessons by "sponsoring" a question **drawn** from their **curriculum**. The interaction in the Global Teenager Learning Circle is a search for information that will enable you and your Circle partners to add to the knowledge of the students. Each school sponsors one question or information request for the Learning Circle.

The question you and your students select is likely to involve learning experiences that take place in your classroom as well as in the Learning Circle. As the sponsors, your students will become the "experts" on the selected theme. Encourage your students to provide some initial background or describe activities that are taking place in your classroom related to the theme. This paragraph details what is involved in sponsoring a question and how your educational goals can be integrated with the Global Teenager Learning Circle. It suggests questions and explains how to work with the other Learning Circle teachers to make your experience a success.

In addition to sponsoring a question in the Learning Circle, students also participate in the Circle by responding to the questions sponsored by their Circle partners. Depending on the time constraints of teachers, there are many ways to organise team or class responses to the Learning Circle. The next chapter of this guide, provides suggestions for organising the responses received, and writing a summary of the responses for your Circle publication.

An effective way to integrate networking with your classroom instruction is to take an activity that you already do in your curriculum and extend it by inviting students in different locations to respond to a related question.

A high school health science class might ask students at other schools to estimate the percentage of students at their school who are involved with drugs and the percentage of students who feel they could have an honest discussion about drug abuse with their parents. Of course the question should match the Circle theme!

To keep in mind:

- 1.** The information requested is likely to show interesting cultural and regional variation. Questions should be selected to take advantage of the diversity represented in the Learning Circle.
- 2.** The request for information has to be reasonable in scope and can be completed within the time frame of the Global Teenager Learning Circle . Your request for information should generally be something that can be completed during one class period.
- 3.** It is advisable to relate the question to the classroom curriculum. Adding international information to lessons or providing a "hands on" co-operative learning activity to demonstrate a concept are very effective ways of extending classroom instruction.
- 4.** The information collected will be of interest to a wide audience of students, teachers, parents, and others who read the publication. The Circle publication you create with 'Circle Publication' is a unique and current document. The information can be of great interest to others in the community.

### **Sponsoring a Question – basic and @vanced**

An effective way to integrate Learning Circle projects into your curriculum is to begin with your own teaching plans. Consider the activities or demonstrations that you use to involve your students in their lessons. It is likely that one or more of these activities would be much more informative with input from students in different social situations and from different geographic regions. The comparison of local and distant information can provide a rich learning experience for your students.

*Example of a Basic sponsored question:*

**From: Leeuwin school, Surinam**  
**To: LC-edu2march2003@dgroups.org**  
**Subject: question from Edu27**

Hi circle members,

Our school has about 400 students. Every year there are some dropouts, most dropouts are students who have gotten pregnant (1%-2% of the student population). Others drop out for other reasons. The policy in Surinam is that pregnant students on junior secondary level may not attend day school during their pregnancy, though they may take evening classes if they want to.

Our question is:

What are the main reasons for students dropping out at your school?

### **Sponsoring a Question - @vanced**

In the chapter 'Introduction of the Learning Circle' the differences between a Basic Learning Circle and an Advanced Learning Circle are explained. The participants of an Advanced Learning Circle have to sponsor a question that invites the other circle members to do research in their own environment and local community. An advanced question requires a broader and deeper level of research. To be able to give answers that match the level of @vanced questions, in-depth research and expert consultation will be necessary.

*Example of an @vanced sponsored question:*

**From: Glenmuir High**  
**To: LC-envmarch2003@dgroups.org**  
**Subject: question from ENV2**

Hi circle members,

This is our first question.

In your country are there any products being "dumped" on your local market?

{1} What are they and what has contributed to this?

{2} Which industry does this affect and how?

{3} How can a consumers protect him/her self?

Please include in your answer -:

- The short coming of local industries.
- How consumers respond to these foreign products {consumer behaviour}.
- Problems arising such as unemployment, imports exceeding exports {deficit in the balance of payments} etc.
- Outline the organisation in your country which protects consumers and their function.

N.B "Dumped" refers to cheap imported products

### **Group Learning**

Sponsoring a Learning Circle question can be done by either the teacher or the students or it can be a team effort of both. Involving the students in the planning phase gives them a sense of ownership that often results in higher motivation. Integrating the network activities with something you already have planned in the curriculum gives you the advantage of extending the learning by using your own teaching materials.

Many teachers working in Learning Circles have reported the effectiveness of having students work in small teams. Each team meets and discusses their task. They decide what needs to be done and assign the work. When they have finished, they have a report which lists all of their names as authors. Grouping students into groups to write together is an effective way to increase the quality of the students' work. This organisation makes it very easy to respond to each question sponsored by your Learning Circle partners.

### **The golden rule: Stupid questions don't exist, just bad formulated questions!**

The following exercise may help your students to formulate their class question. You have 2 weeks for sponsoring the question, so you can split the exercises in two or even three!

1. Divide your class in four groups
2. Let each group brainstorm on what sorts of ideas linked to the Theme
3. Ask them to formulate a question within the Learning Circle Theme
4. Collect the questions and give each group the three questions from the other groups
5. Let the students formulate an answer to the question
6. Collect the answers and give them to the group that formulated the question
7. Let the group compare the answers collected and see if it contained all the information wanted and if necessary adjust their question
8. Discuss the four questions with the whole class and choose in a democratic way the best question to be send to the learning Circle partners

### **Keeping Track**

As the Learning Circle forms, you and your students will need to keep track of the questions that have been asked and your class response to the questions. You will find a Learning Circle Attendance Sheet for each section of the Learning Circle on the Virtual Campus. Each time you get a message from a school with their question for the Learning Circle, one or more students can record the information on the appropriate Attendance Sheet. These Attendance Sheets will help you organise your students' responses to the Learning Circle. Strategies for responding to questions are provided in the next chapter.

## **Sponsoring a Question Checklist**

You are well prepared for the next phase of the Learning Circles when you have checked off each of the following steps:

### **Sponsoring a Question Checklist**

- Discussed project ideas**
- Related project sponsored question to own curriculum**
- Practised on formulating questions**
- Democratically chosen a question to be sponsored**
- Monitoring individual student progress**
- Using the Classcodes**
- Prepared and Sent Sponsored Question**
- Stored and shared all incoming messages**

## **Phase 4      Responding to the Learning Circle Questions**

### **Weeks 4-5-6**

During this phase of the Learning Circle students will start real global co-operation by exchanging knowledge in the Learning Circle. Your students now have to respond to the questions sent by their Learning Circle partners and at the same time receive answers to their question.

Important to mention is that responding to the question is also an important learning process: the students have to investigate different questions on the same theme. This will enlarge their overview on the theme, it's a multidisciplinary approach.

The students will be eager to see responses to their question. The time will go very quickly so it is important that you respond to questions as you receive them and not wait until every school has sent a question.

Participating in the Learning Circle means responding to questions from the other classrooms. Your Learning Circle partners will be expecting to receive a response to their question from your students unless you indicate otherwise. This does not mean that you need to have your whole class respond to each question.

It is not necessary, and often not desirable, to have every student respond to each question. While students are initially excited to receive mail, they soon lose interest if they read message after message with similar content. However, sending only the "best" responses may make students feel that their writing is not important. It is best to find a way to involve all of your students in the message exchange without sending repetitive information.

### **Responding to a Question in the @vanced Learning Circle**

In the chapter 'Introduction of the Learning Circle' the differences between a Basic Learning Circle and an Advanced Learning Circle are explained. Questions in the @vanced Learning Circle enforce and invite the student to consult different resources. There will be a high level of interactivity and a high frequency of communication. The questions will be quite complex and therefore much time for questions and answers will be needed. The questions have to encourage communication and there will be space to ask further explanations to the students who asked the question. It goes without saying that the students are very likely to come up against problems during their research and they need the opportunity to ask further explanations to those who sent the question.

An extended form of research is not the only characteristic of responding to an advanced question. The students also have to refer to the resources they consulted. The answer has to contain information about the persons they interviewed for instance, the internet-addresses or books they consulted etc. The answer has to be a real research-report.

## Group Learning

There are many ways you can organise your students to assure that they will be able to respond to requests from other classrooms. If the information request fits well into your curriculum, you may want to involve all of your students. If it does not, you might make it an extra credit project for a small group of students who finish their regular classroom work.

### Classroom project team

The following exercise may help your students to formulate their answers. You have 3 weeks for responding to the questions, so divide your time well!

1. Divide your class in four groups (maybe the same groups as you used for formulating the question) – week 1
2. Give each group two questions sponsored by the partners - week 1
3. Let the students research the questions – week 1
4. Let the students formulate an answer to the question – week 1
5. Collect the questions and the draft answers and revise them yourself, by the peer students and you can even send the draft to your partner and ask them for comments – week 2
6. Let the student write the final answers – week 2
7. Send the answer to the Learning Circle – week 3
8. You can discuss the most interesting questions and answer in the classroom

NOTE: Also other classes and students at your school may want to be involved in a particular project. Perhaps a science, math, or foreign language teacher at your school is working on a similar theme and would welcome the opportunity to become involved in the Learning Network exchange. You might find that one of the activities sponsored by another classroom is perfect for students in your school's computer club. As a Learning Circle teacher, your role is to organise the project responses from your school and to provide your partners with weekly updates so that they know when to expect the information for their projects.

The important thing to remember is that your participation is a vital part of the Learning Circle. Your partners in distant locations will be eager to hear from you and your students. If you log on and read messages but do not respond or send messages of your own, no one will know you are there. So, let your partners know you're there and you appreciate hearing from them!

### Sending Learning Circle Responses

Your students will be preparing responses for the questions in the Learning Circle. Students can compose their work on the word processing program they commonly use in the classroom or they can type their response directly into a message. When students have edited their work, there needs to be a classroom procedure for making sure their final version is sent on the Learning Circle. It is best to set up some mail management procedures for sending and receiving mail.

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Messages are easier to read if you add a row of computer symbols (like the asterisks above) to clearly separate different parts of your message. Please remind your students to include the following information with each response:

- (1) the question and name of the sponsoring school,
- (2) name of class or students who wrote the response,
- (3) name of school and city of the author(s).

### **Responding to the Learning Circle Questions Checklist**

You are well prepared for the next phase of the Learning Circles when you have checked off each of the following steps:

#### **Responding to the LC Checklist**

- Did extensive research on each question**
- Practised on formulating a complete answer to a question**
- Practised on writing in general**
- Monitoring individual student progress**
- Using the Classcodes**
- Send a response to all questions of the partners**
- Stored and shared incoming messages to your question**

## **Phase 5      Summarising the Learning Circle**

### **Week 7-8-9**

Phase 4 is meant for organise, summarise and reflect on the information received. The sponsors of a question are the ones who create the summary for the Circle publication for distribution to the other schools. This can be done as a document. To stimulate the use of the computer, you might also want to publish your summary (incl. graphics) on the Internet. This is especially encouraged in the @vanced Learning Circles.

The students who sponsor an question are responsible for using the information received and make comparisons across the different regions, for collecting and for editing the material. This process will help them learn how to review, summarise, evaluate and present information.

Summarising the information for other participants in their Learning Circle and for parents and educators who will read the 'Circle Publication' gives students a clearly defined purpose and audience for their writing.

### **Group Learning**

A team approach can be a very effective way of involving the whole class in the analysis of the information. Divide your class into teams so that there is one team for each of the schools responding to your project

#### **How to write one summary with a group?**

The following exercise may help your students to formulate their Learning Circle summary. You have 3 weeks for write the summary, so divide your time well!

1. Divide your class in four groups – week 1
2. Give each group all answers provided by the partners and an outline for the summary- week 1
3. Let the students read the answers carefully and make present their most important findings and conclusion and put those together in one chart – week 2
4. Let each group write a draft version of one part of the summary (see outline), incl. all the comments on the chart – week 3
5. Put the summary together and let the students revise it – week 3
6. Let the students write their final version of their part of the summary – week 3
7. Send the summary to the Learning Circle – week 3
8. You can discuss the summaries send by your partners in the classroom

## **The Summary**

### *Basic and @vanced Summary*

In any group effort, the ideal situation is 100% participation, but the reality may be somewhat less. It is likely that your students will have received responses from many of the schools in their Learning Circle, but perhaps not all of the schools. Even three or four responses from different locations can provide enough material for a rich 'Circle Publication'.

There are many different formats for displaying information. Students might want to show the information in bar graphs, histograms, pie charts, or lists. Other information might be better summarised in paragraph form. The students can decide if they want to include samples of the messages that were sent or only their summary of the content.

### *@vanced Learning Circle Publication*

In the Advances Learning Circle, this phase is also meant for organising, summarising and reflecting on the information received. The difference is that in the Advanced Learning Circle the students don't only write a summary but create a Publication which is based upon the summary and which shows a higher level of in-depth analysis of the result. This Publication will be a digital presentation of their own choice (for. i. a website, a PowerPoint-presentation, an audio-video-presentation). For examples please refer to the products made by Romanian schools, available on the Gallery at the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)).

### *Analysing Requested Information*

You and your students will need to develop strategies for recording, examining, and summarising the information that you requested. Students can help plan how they will save, store, and compare the messages. Some information may need to be integrated. If they asked all classes to collect data or respond to a number of questions, it is not always informative to just list all the responses by each class. Sometimes a narrative summary of the responses is effective. Or students may want to compare the responses from all classes to a single question. Sometimes listing the schools on a continuum or grouping schools with similar responses will help students understand the relationships. A general format for reviewing the responses might be to address the following three questions:

1. Why did we ask the question?
2. What did we know about the theme when we started?
3. What did we learn in our classroom?
4. What did we expect to learn?
5. What did we learn from the responses of the students?
6. What were the differences in the different countries?
7. Why do we think these differences exist?
8. What are the consequences of the differences for a country?

The students might think in terms of parts as they review the responses from their partner classes. As a Learning Circle teacher, your task during this period is to help your students collect the information they received from the other schools and summarise it. There is no perfect format for the presentation of different types of information. It is important to help students think about how to best display their information and explain what they learned from collecting the information. This last step is essential in the learning process. Students need time to reflect on the Learning Circle.

### *Evaluation Strategies*

The goal of these strategies is to help students learn how to evaluate writing received from partner classes. The role of the teacher is to help students learn the importance of constructive evaluation. For example, if a student says, "I think this answer should be rejected because I don't like it," the teacher needs to help the student specify what features led to that overall assessment. One way to do this is to say that "not liking it" does not help others know how to improve their writing. Then the student can be encouraged to think about the reason that led to the assessment. Was the answer poorly written or badly organized? Was there enough information? As students begin to form evaluation standards to apply to the writing of others, they also begin to apply these same criteria to their own writing.

### *Length of Your Project Summary*

Teachers often want to know how long their Learning Circle project summary should be. The length is something you will want to discuss with the other teachers in your Learning Circle. In some cases groups have set limits, like 3-5 pages per classroom. In other cases, they leave the decision up to the classroom sponsoring the question. There is no need for all the project summaries to be the same size.

Each classroom should prepare a title page for their project summary. It is important to give credit to each class that participated in a project. This can be done by either crediting students' work in the project summary or listing names of the participating classrooms in an acknowledgement box.

### *Designing Your Circle Publication*

You may already be familiar with a word processing or desk top publishing program that allows for easy layout and printing of the information that you have selected for your section of the publication. If you have never used a desktop publishing programs, you might find that learning now will be a great opportunity, less representative but much quicker to do the layout or by cutting and pasting the printed text.

*Example of a Learning Circle Question Summary (edited)*

**From: KSC@world.us**  
**To: LC-healthmarch2003@dgroups.org**  
**Subject: circle publication from Health7**

Drugs and Drug Abuse

Our question examined the touchy issue of drug use and drug abuse in our schools. We know that these are issues that some people don't want to even think about and certainly don't want to hear about. They want to think that drugs are a problem for other places but not where they live. In our class we have been discussing the legal and social issues related to drugs and some of the other related social problems: poverty, gangs, money, crimes, unemployment, latchkey kids, and lack of community programs.

We compared the effects of marijuana and alcohol and discussed the arguments for the legalization of marijuana and an increase in prohibition against alcohol. Some of us felt that if we treated drugs the same as we do alcohol, the government could tax the sale, establish restrictions, and control the use. This would take away the money made in drug dealing and keep people from going crazy when they lose their drug contact or someone starts to make them pay a lot more money. Other people thought that we should work towards a drug free environment including alcohol and cigarettes. They said we should make all drugs illegal and try to teach everyone that they can have a better life if they stay away from these things.

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OUR QUESTION FOR THE LEARNING CIRCLE: Do you think that alcohol is a drug and what would you do if someone tried to force you to take drugs?

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ON ALCOHOL AS A DRUG

We heard from 7 of the schools in our Learning Circle and found that most of the people agree with us that alcohol is a drug. The students in Virginia said: "Drugs are things that alter your mental state and alcohol does this." The students in Indiana said: "It is a drug because you can get addicted to it and then do things that you can't remember." Only the students in British Columbia and California didn't agree. One-third of the California students said alcohol in beer and wine was a food and it was only the misuse of it that caused problems. Students in British Columbia said: "If alcohol is a drug, so is coffee, tea and soda."

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF A STRANGER TRIED TO MAKE YOU TAKE DRUGS?

Most of the people at the different schools (83%) said that they would run away, but 12% across all of the sites said that they would try to reason with the drug dealer. A relatively small percent said they would take the drug. The other responses were mostly things like "beat up the drug dealer" and "fake taking the drug." Here are the results:

School	Run Away	Reason w/ Dealer	Take the Drug	Other
Jefferson High, WV	85	15	-	-
Riverside, CA	80	10	1	8
Bridgewater High, NJ	95	5	-	-
San Diego High, TX	100	-	-	-
Eastbend High, NY	55	25	18	2
Ulysses Grant, MI	88	11	-	1
Eastwood High, FL	79	17	2	4
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MEAN	83%	12%	3%	2%

### OUR CONCLUSIONS

We discussed the answers about alcohol and the reasons students gave. We discussed a number of ideas. One was to not sell "hard" liquor, only beer and wine. The other was to give people in public places (like bars) a limit, like only one drink an hour. Some of us thought that you shouldn't be allowed to drink in public places, but you could have as much alcohol as you wanted in your home.

We are worried that some of the students said that they would take drugs if forced. We think it would not be good to do that even if you were being forced. We could see some differences in the drug patterns at the different schools.

## Summarising the Learning Circle Checklist

You are well prepared for the next phase of the Learning Circles when you have checked off each of the following steps:

### Summarising the LC Checklist

- Evaluated all answers**
- Practised on formulating a complete summary**
- Practised on writing in general**
- Monitoring individual student progress**
- Using the Classcodes**
- Send the summary to all questions of the partners**
- Stored and shared incoming summaries**

## **Phase 6      Closing the Learning Circle**

### **Week 10**

All good things have to come to an end. It's time to say goodbye..

#### **Closing the Circle**

Any class or group who has worked closely together to accomplish a task will feel some sadness when the work is done and the group disbands. After working together for 10 weeks you will see that a lot of friendship has developed within your (virtual) classroom. It is very nice to prepare a short summary of your experiences on the Learning Circle, thanking each of the classrooms for their participation. This is also your possibility to exchange addresses for future correspondence.

#### **Publishing Circle publication**

Your Circle publication will be very easy to assemble at the end of the session. The easiest way to do it is to print copies of the messages containing Class Letters and the summaries from each of the schools, and staple all of this together into a booklet. Other classes will want to copy (or cut) the information from the messages and arrange it on pages with either computer graphics or hand drawn illustrations.

Students with desktop publishing experience may want to design the whole booklet online. Working with information that they have collected and finding the best way to display it can be a very good learning experience. They might enjoy sharing copies of their finished product with their partner schools.

An online version of the booklet can be published on the Internet and will appear on the Virtual Campus ([www.iicd.org/virtualcampus](http://www.iicd.org/virtualcampus)). If your school has its own website, it is of course possible to publish the booklet there as well.

#### *Sharing the Circle Publication*

When you have finished the Circle publication, you can stand back and admire what you have accomplished by working together with distant classes!

You may want to make a few extra copies to send to the people who helped make your participation in the Learning Circle possible — your principal, your school board, your computer co-ordinator, and the school district office. You and your students can send emails to friends and family referring to the website the booklet was published on and keep hard copies for later.

#### **Moving On...**

We hope you and your students enjoyed your participation in the Global Teenager Learning Circle. We encourage you to take part in the next learning program. Your experience with this project is very valuable to us. Within two weeks after the end of the Learning Circle, your Global Teenager Country Co-ordinator will send you an online questionnaire. We hope you will fill it out, along with the registration form for the next session.

IICD welcomes your comments and suggestions for future development of the Global Teenager project.  
Please send them to:

IICD  
PO Box 11586  
2502 AN, The Hague  
The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 70 3117311  
Fax: +31 70 3117322  
Email: [globalteenager@iicd.org](mailto:globalteenager@iicd.org)

This guide was adapted from the work of Margaret Riel on learning circles ([www.learn.org/circles](http://www.learn.org/circles)).