Barry S. Kramer

Introduction

iEARN (The International and Educational Resource Network) Learning Circles are collaborative, project-based partnerships that connect schools located throughout the world. Each Learning Circle is made up of a team of 6 - 8 teachers and their classes joined together electronically by the use of the Internet, e-mail, and online forums. The group works together around a selected theme for a 3 to 4 month period on projects drawn from the curriculum of each of the classrooms. At the end of the session, the group collects and publishes its work either electronically or in print. After the publication is completed, the Learning Circle comes to an end. Each session begins with new groupings of classes into Learning Circles. Detailed information about this project can be found at http://www.iearn.org/circles/.

Many teachers visit the iEARN - Learning Circles Web site each year seeking information on the project. Currently, there is a need to attract new teachers into the project. The future success of Learning Circles critically depends on attracting new and diverse teachers and classrooms from around the world.   There is also a need to help teachers identify the different options and choices they have for participation. An interactive multimedia presentation on Learning Circles would help interested educators understand how easy it is to participate. It would also help them realize the type of work their students could accomplish.

This product would provide users with information on the Learning Circle concept and model. The basic structure and organization of Learning Circles would be explained and demonstrated. Examples would be given of past projects along with guidelines for successful future implementation. Embedded items would be used to help learners process their learning and to assess their understanding of the concepts. Upon completion of this tutorial, the user should understand the basic steps needed to implement a Learning Circle project in a classroom. As part of this process this product would guide the user in choosing a project area from one of the three Learning Circle themes - Computer Chronicles, Places and Perspectives, and MindWorks.

Goals:

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will possess the knowledge of the structure and organization of Learning Circles.

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to describe finished products students could accomplish through participation in Learning Circles.

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to describe the goals of the three Learning Circle themes - Computer Chronicles, Places and Perspectives, and MindWorks.

Client:

The client for this project would be the international secretariat of iEARN (The International and Educational Resource Network - www.iearn.org). iEARN is a non-profit organization made up of over 15,000 schools in 100 countries. The goal of iEARN is to empower educators and students to work together online using the Internet and other communications technologies. According to iEARN statistics (www.iearn.org), approximately 750,000 - 1,000,000 students each day are engaged in collaborative project work worldwide.

Learning Circles is a high profile project sponsored and supported by iEARN. iEARN's interest in this product would be to attract educators to participate in Learning Circles. The Learning Circles model is often used by iEARN to support collaborative work groups in other major online projects (such as the CIVICS and Bridge Projects. Many of these projects are supported by grants from the United States government, industry endowments, educational institutions, and private foundations.

Since iEARN is a non-profit organization, most contributions are made on a volunteer basis by individual members. Products used on the Web site must be of high quality and must fit iEARN's "vision that telecommunications technologies can enhance teaching and learning - and make a human difference at the same time." (www.iearn.org)

The Learning Circles Web site and project is administered by Margaret Riel, Ph.D. a Visiting Faculty member of the Graduate School of Education at Pepperdine University, in Malibu, California. Dr. Riel developed the Learning Circles model and has been administering this Web site for iEARN since 1996.

Scope:

This product would provide users with information on Learning Circle in the following four areas

1. Learning Circles Background Information

     Identification of the Purpose of This Tutorial
     Explanation of How Learning Circles Are Organized

2. The Learning Circle Concept and Model

     General Description of Work Groups
     Interaction of Members

3. Phases of a Learning Circle

>   Getting Ready for Learning Circles
>   Opening the Learning Circle
>   Planning the Learning Circle Projects
>   Exchanging Student Work on Learning Circle Projects
>   Organizing the Circle Publication
>   Closing the Learning Circle

4. Learning Circle Themes

>   Places and Perspectives (History, Geography, Social Science)
>   Computer Chronicles (Journalism, Computer Publishing, English, Creative Writing)
>   Mind Works (Creative Writing, Literature, Social Science)

The basic structure and organization of Learning Circles would be explained and demonstrated. Representative examples of student work will be given from past Computer Chronicles, Places and Perspectives, and Mindworks projects along with guidelines for successful future implementation of similar projects. Embedded items would be used to help learners process their learning and to assess their understanding of the concepts. In the end, the learners should understand these four essential areas of Learning Circles. The learners should also have the opportunity to sign-up or request more information.

Target Audience:

The learners for whom this product is designed are educators from international schools and the United States. Since they must be members of iEARN (The International and Educational Resource Network) in order to participate in the project they come with a background and familiarity to online collaborative project-based work. Most educators will have a fairly high level of computer literacy. They have come to the Learning Circles Web site because they are interested in finding out more information about the project or they want to know how to participate in the project.

The typical educator who is visiting this site is female and teaches a class using various forms of educational technology. The students that are taught by these educators range from 5 - 19 and include students from the first grade to seniors in high school. This teacher is either attempting to participate in a project for the first time or has participated in other projects and is looking for something that will have strong participation and definite results. Many of the teachers will be from international schools and are highly motivated to connect with schools in the United States.

Most likely these educators have heard about the Learning Circles project because they attended a workshop at a regional or international conference. It is also possible that they were motivated to view this information because they saw the Learning Circles advertisement on main page of the iEARN Web site.

Educators in the United States, Canada, European countries, Australia, and Japan will most likely be viewing this product on a computer using a high-speed connection. Educators from schools in Asia, South America, and Africa will most likely be using a slower dial-up connection. Their computer access will be limited and may be unreliable for projects that take a long viewing time and require a great deal of connectivity.

Limitations:

Major limitations on this project are in the areas of human and financial resources. Since iEARN is a non-profit organization with limited funding and staff there is little support they can offer except the encouragement and Web space needed to host the finished project. The success of iEARN online projects is very dependent on the efforts and enthusiasm of the sponsoring educators and participants. The budget for this product would be minimal or nonexistent.

The time frame for this project is constrained by the December 3, 2003 completion date of the Educational Technology 404 course at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The work plan, storyboards, project documentation, development files, and final exported files must be accomplished between October and the completion date.

Limiting factors that should also be considered are Internet access speed and the capability of the browsers the users will be using. While most educators will have high speed Internet access, it cannot be assumed that everyone will. There is a growing population of educators in Asia and Africa who have shown interest in this project. Some educators in Asia and Africa will have high-speed access, but most educators will have an unreliable dial-up connection. This project should be able to be accessed using a dial-up connection. Furthermore, it is anticipated that not every interested user will have a browser that is equipped with the latest Flash plug-ins needed to view the product. Users will need to be notified that they have to update their browser.

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Finished Projects:

The client will be given the following items related to the project:

1. A Work Plan
      a. Project Introduction
      b. Project Goals
      c. A Client Description
      d. Scope of the Project
      e. Profile of the Target Audience
      f. Limitations/Constraints
      g. List of Finished Products
      h. Timeline of Work Completion
2. Storyboards
      a. Containing rough ideas of critical interactions
3. Project documentation
      a. iEARN Web site and background information - www.iearn.org
      b. Learning Circles Web site and background information - www.iearn/circles/
      c. Learning Circles Teacher Handbook
      d. CD containing actual student Leaning Circle projects
4. Development files
      a. Learning Circles Background Information
      b. The Learning Circle Concept and Model
      c. Phases of a Learning Circle
      d. Learning Circle Themes
5. Final exported files
      a. Complete Project

Timeline:

All work for the project will be completed by Barry S. Kramer according to the following timelines:
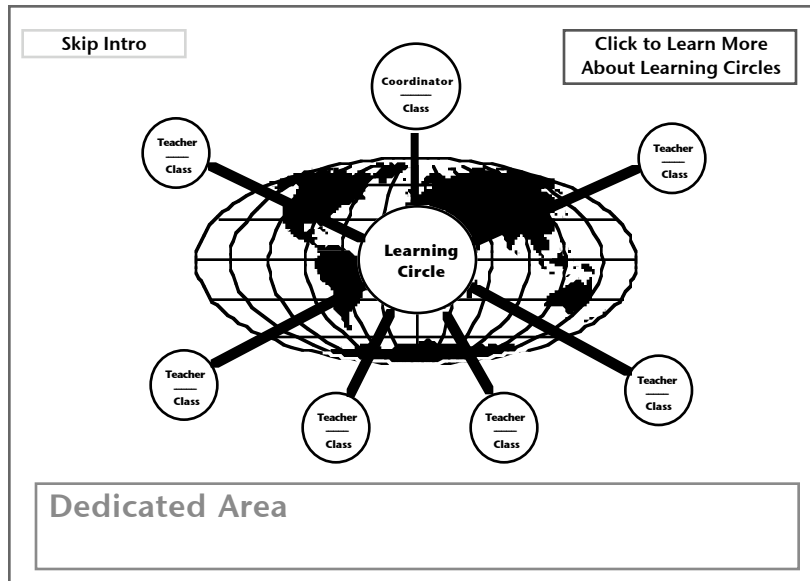
1. The Work Plan - Completion date: September 22, 2003
2. Storyboards - Completion date: September 29, 2003
3. Project Documentation - Completion date: December 3, 2003
      a. iEARN Web site and background information
      b. Learning Circles Web site and background information
4. Development Files - Completion date: December 3, 2003
5. Final Exported Files - Completion date: December 3, 2003

Work Plan - Assignment 1

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Screen 1000

Skip Intro

Click to Learn More About Learning Circles

Coordinator
Class

Teacher
Class

Teacher
Class

Learning Circle

Teacher
Class

Teacher
Class

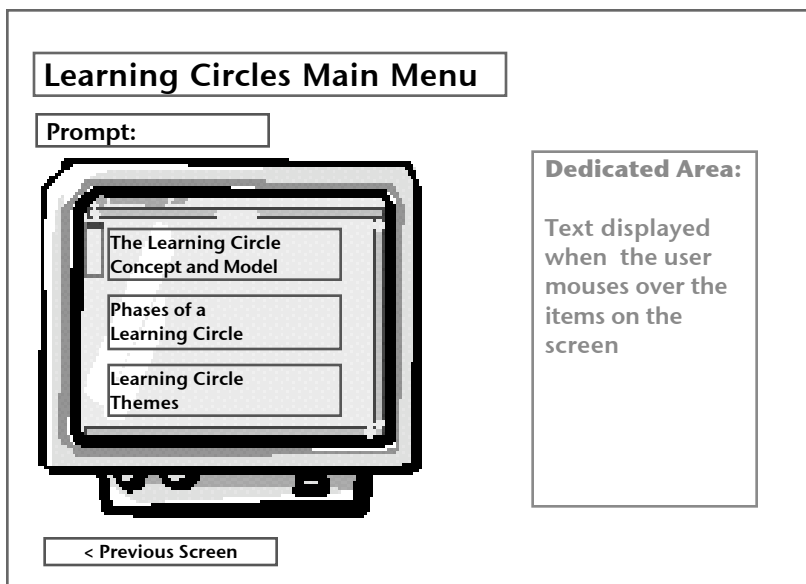Teacher
Class

Teacher
Class

Dedicated Area

Design Notes:

- The screen will begin with just the globe.
- Next the Learning Circle image will appear. Text will appear underneath in the dedicated area to describe Learning Circles.
- The Coordinator/class image appears and is accompanied by an explanation in the Dedicated Area.
- The Teacher/Class images appear and are accompanied by an explanation in the Dedicated Area.
- After the Introduction a button appears prompting users to click to learn more.

Learning Circles Background Information

Screen 1500

Learning Circles Main Menu

Prompt:

The Learning Circle
Concept and Model

Phases of a
Learning Circle

Learning Circle
Themes

Dedicated Area:

Text displayed when the user mouses over the items on the screen

< Previous Screen

Design Notes:

- The screen contains a graphic of a monitor.
- Users are prompted to mouse over the items on the screen to view a brief description.
- Users are prompted to click the items on the screen to learn more.
- Text for the mouse over appears in the Dedicated Area.
- A button is given to allow users to return to the Learning Circles Background Information intro movie.
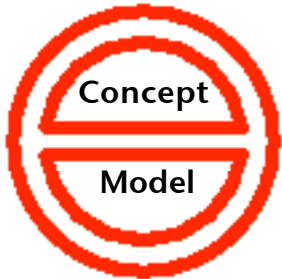
Learning Circles Main Menu

Screen 2000

The Learning Circle Concept and Model

Prompt:

Concept

Model

Dedicated Area

Text displayed when the user mouses over the items on the screen

< Previous Screen   Main Menu   Next Screen >

Design Notes:

- The screen features the concept/model image.
- Users are prompted to mouse over the two sections of the circle to learn more about Learning Circle Concept and model.
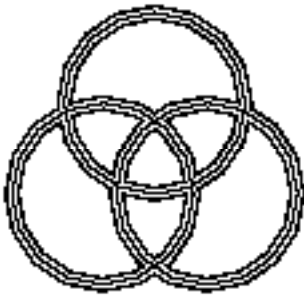- Text for the mouse over appears in the Dedicated Area.

Learning Circle Concept and Model

Screen 2500

A Review of The Learning Circle Model

Stem:

Prompt:

Dedicated Area for Feedback

Text displayed when the user clicks on a portion of the circle

< Previous Screen   Main Menu   Next Screen >

Design Notes:

- This is a multiple-choice embedded item.
- The screen contains a graphic of intertwining circles.
- Users are prompted to click the area of the circle with the correct response.
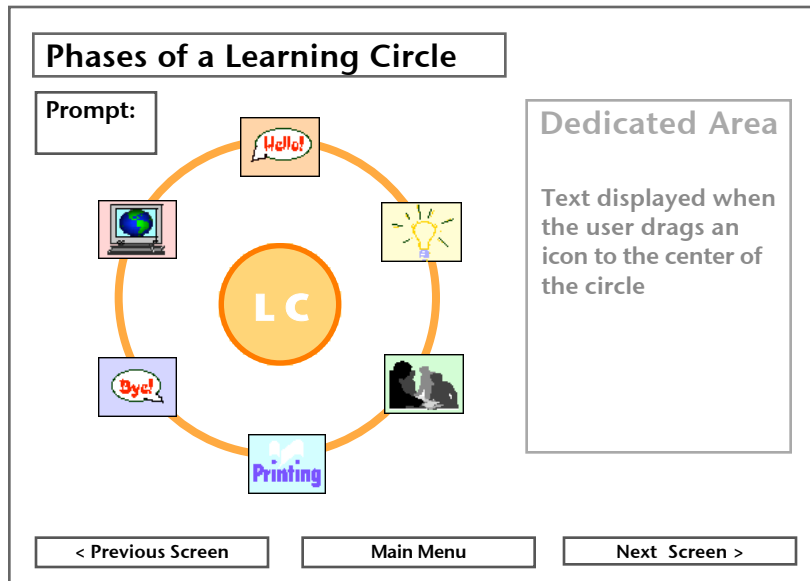- Feedback is given for the correct and incorrect responses.

The Learning Circle Model - Embedded Item

Barry S. Kramer

Screen 3000

Phases of a Learning Circle

Prompt:

Dedicated Area

Text displayed when the user drags an icon to the center of the circle

L C

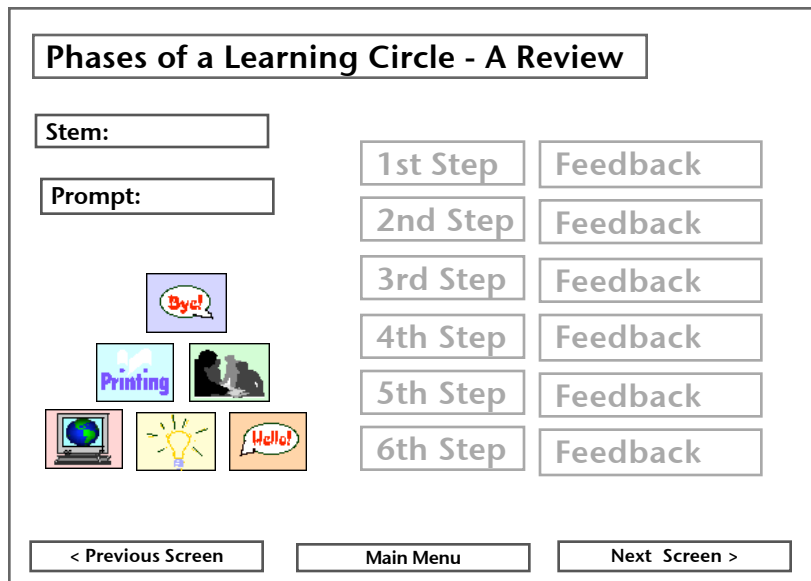< Previous Screen | Main Menu | Next Screen >

Design Notes:

- The six phases of a Learning Circle appear on the screen.
- Users are prompted to drag each item to the center circle to view a brief description.
- Users are prompted to click on each item to learn more.
- Text for the dragged items appears in the Dedicated Area.

Phases of a Learning Circle

Screen 3500

Phases of a Learning Circle - A Review

Stem:

Prompt:

1st Step	Feedback
2nd Step	Feedback
3rd Step	Feedback
4th Step	Feedback
5th Step	Feedback
6th Step	Feedback

< Previous Screen | Main Menu | Next Screen >

Design Notes:

- This is a matching embedded item.
- Users are prompted to drag the "Phases of a Learning Circle" icons to their correct order.
- Feedback is given for the correct and incorrect responses.
- When users make a correct response a brief description of the phase is given next to the place holder. The description remains until the users move to the next screen.
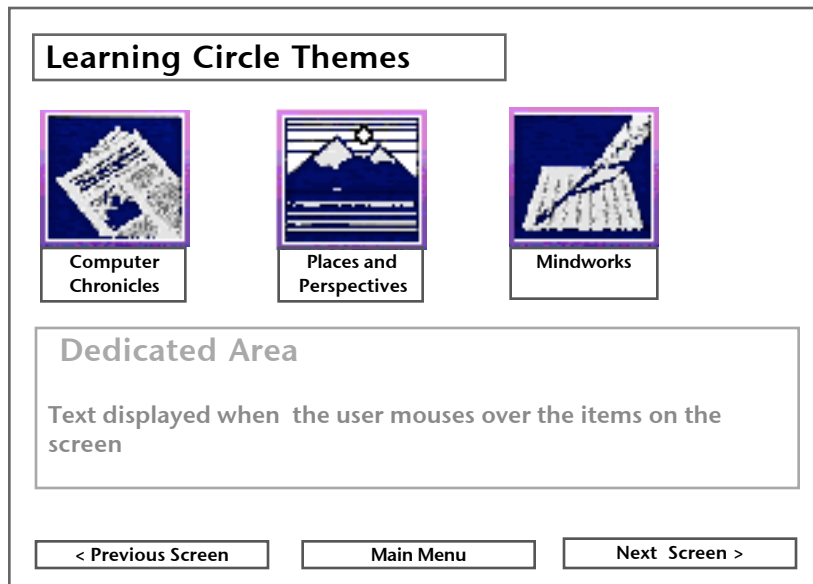
Learning Circle Themes - Embedded Item

Barry S. Kramer

Screen 4000

Learning Circle Themes

Computer Chronicles	Places and Perspectives	Mindworks

Dedicated Area

Text displayed when the user mouses over the items on the screen
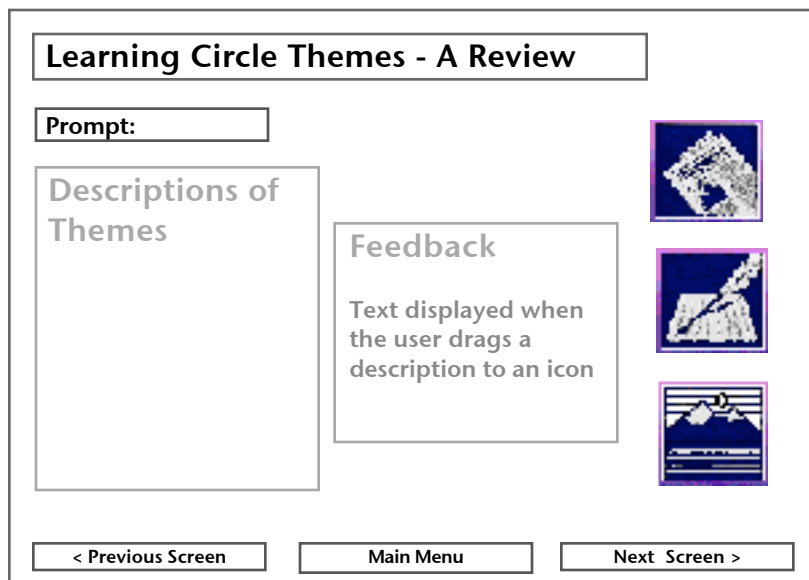
| < Previous Screen | Main Menu | Next Screen > |

Design Notes:

- The three Learning Circles Themes appear on the screen.
- Users are prompted to mouse over each item to view a brief description.
- Users are prompted to click on each item to learn more.
- Text for the mouse over appears in the Dedicated Area.

Learning Circle Themes

Screen 4500

Learning Circle Themes - A Review

Prompt:

Descriptions of Themes

Feedback

Text displayed when the user drags a description to an icon

| < Previous Screen | Main Menu | Next Screen > |

Design Notes:

- This is a reduced set matching embedded item.
- Users are prompted to drag descriptions to the icons on the right hand side.
- There are more descriptions than there are icons.
- Feedback is given for the correct and incorrect responses.

Learning Circle Themes - Embedded Item