

Online Literature Circles: an engaging way to learn

Presented by Terry Taylor at

Emerging Technologies for
Online Learning Symposium

San Jose, CA
July 2010

*... with immense gratitude to my learning partners and
colleagues, Shelley Little from SD 6, and Kari Kroker
from SD 8, and to all our wonderful students.*

We have birthed this project together!!!



Where I'm comin' from...



Picture this...



Your connections???

With two learning partners, talk for two purposeful minutes. If you are a virtual attendee, record your thinking or wonderings in the chat ...

One thing you notice about Online Lit Circles?

A connection you are thinking about?

What you are wondering?

What *is* an Online Literature Circle?

Basic structure of Online Literature Circles

- 5 - 7 novels in each Book Club**
- 2 classrooms connected through Moodle**
- Each student posts to the Discussion Forum each week**
- Online lit circles usually run for 4 weeks**
- Students respond to teacher questions, to each other's thinking and also initiate their own thoughtful questions**



What is an Online Literature Circle?



Besides discussion forums, OLCs use

- “Thinking about your thinking” online **journal** - a metacognitive tool for students to set learning goals, choose evidence of learning and reflect on their progress
- Online **collaborative group projects** between schools – diverse demonstrations of learning about big ideas
- a **Virtual Coffeehouse** forum for students to meet and talk with purpose

Learning with others!

Online Literature Circles...



- Use technology as a **powerful social learning** tool to engage and connect learners across mountains, time zones, and between communities
- Enhance learning opportunities for **all students**
- Increase the scope of rural and urban classrooms alike - **beyond our walls** and communities
- Use **new media**/Web 2.0 tools familiar to students, **in purposeful and engaging learning**
- Foster **teacher collaboration** and **innovation**
- **Build capacity** and nurture learning communities for both students and for teachers



Online Literature Circles: Technology as a learning tool ..

- A disclaimer... *“Miss Scarlett, I don’t know nothing ‘bout ...”*
- The technology has to be transparent
- It’s about **good teaching** and good learning, not about the technology as an end
- What’s important in the virtual classroom is **engagement** and **thoughtful discussion**
- Technology acts a **tool** for building community, a vehicle for learning conversations

Online Literature Circles – let's take a look...

Go to <http://wiki.bcelearner.ca> – SD 10 Moodle site

- English 11/12 – New West– Lucerne -2008 -09

Enrollment key: onlinelit

- Read a few forum posts...
 - Notice the ***** multiple attempts and the peer feedback in week 4. Read some questions and student responses
 - *What's one thing that stands out for you?*
- English 9/10 – 2008-09 –Rossland and Lucerne

Enrollment key: engage


- Read the rules and guidelines, exemplars and criteria
- Check out the Learning Journal in Week 6 Eng 9/10
 - *How does this fit with assessment for learning?*

Online Lit Circles: let's take another peek

- Go to <http://www.online.bcelearner.ca>
- Enroll in Online Literature Circles – LVR and Lucerne
- Examine Character Wheel Wiki – a collaborative pre-writing strategy
- Group Collaborative Project – diverse demonstrations of learning

Online Literature Circles: let's take a listen

Collaboration Group Project: a group podcast on the book, *Born to Run* by Christopher McDougall

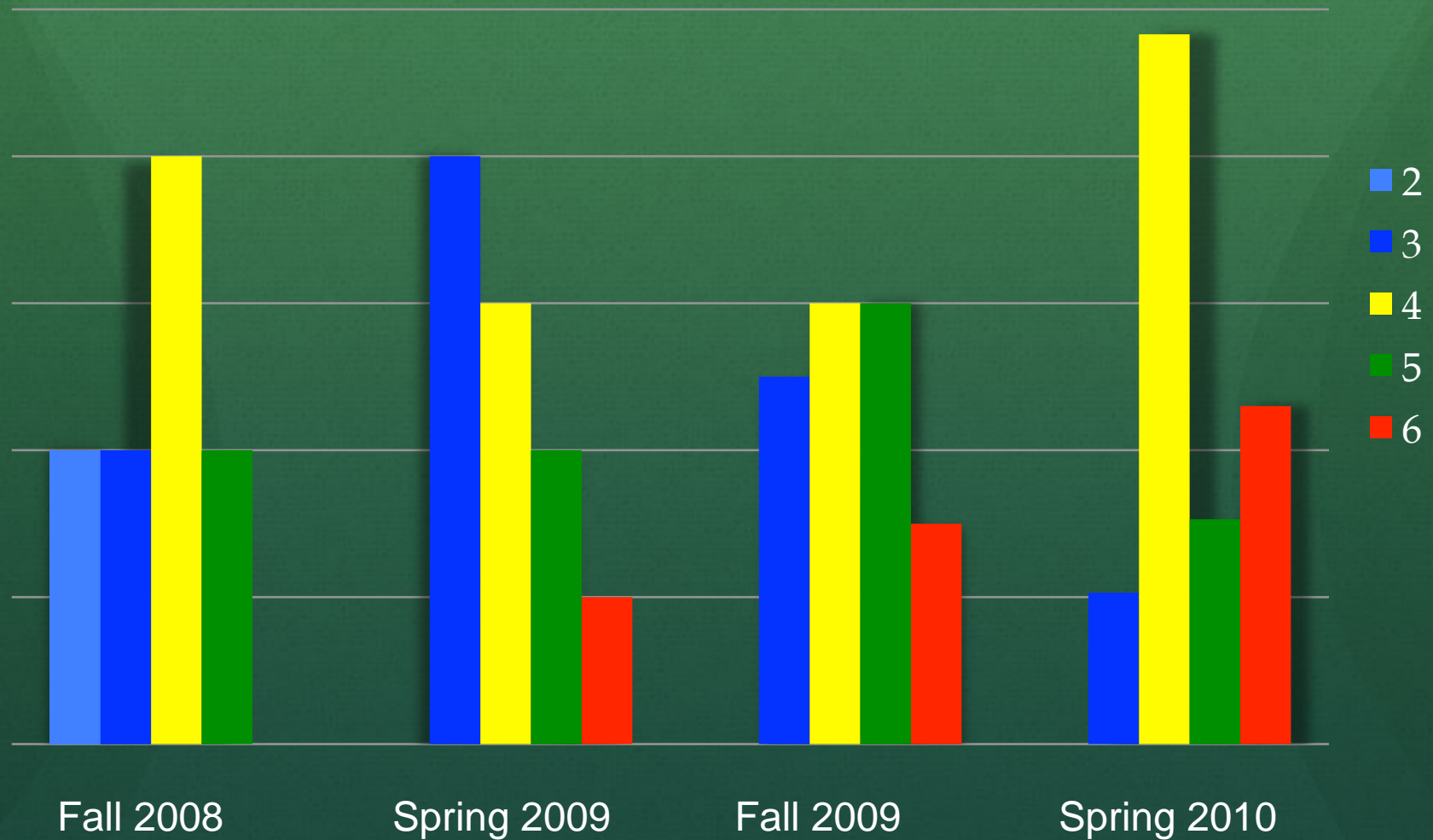
1. Students read the book at their own pace
2. Posted in two discussion forums to teacher or student questions
3. Created a group formed of students from the two schools in the circle
4. Chose a big idea, a way to show their learning, and made a work flow plan. Collaborated online sharing files.
5. Here's Max's podcast: 

Check it out!! – the “Top Three” Virtual Coffeehouse engages students

- go to <http://wiki.bcelearner.ca>
- English 11/12 Online Lit Circle – LVR and Lucerne – 2007-2008
- Enrollment key: onlinelit
- Check out the *Ninjas/Pirates/Cowboys* forum, a great example of students using text and image to persuade/communicate their ideas
 - *Why are these students so engaged???*

DATA – Fall 2008 – Spring 2010

Reading Improves for All Learners



Online Lit Circles: Inspiring Grand Conversations (Brownlie)



Links to R.Allington and F.Brownlie – a fit with best practice and research-based pedagogy:

- Student **choice** of novel(s) and questions
- Use of **diverse** text fosters **inclusion** – aboriginal, multi-cultural, graphic, Canadian voice, and text that reflects various **interests and reading levels**
- **Access** and **reading volume** increase– students read 1 – 6 novels +++ all the discussion forums and coffeehouse posts!



Online Lit Circles: What makes 'em so grand?

- **Genuine audience** for student writing increases relevancy and **ownership**, enhances students' desire to edit and to communicate ideas with their peers
- Students **LOVE to read each other's work** – this aids in their thinking and allows them to see **diverse models and exemplars**, to see various ways of approaching the task and honour diversity
- **Descriptive feedback** about their work from peers and teachers is timely and connected to **criteria**

Online Lit Circles: Inspiring Grand Conversations – Why do they work?

Link to Catherine Snow's Reading Next (2004) research

- **Inclusion!** *All* students can be successful
 - Students can choose conversations at the concrete or inferential levels and their own text – allows **differentiation**
 - Student thinking is scaffolded by seeing **exemplars of how others think** and respond to literature; these models expand as new posts are added.
 - **Structured partner talk** levels the field
 - **Technology component in “Virtual Coffeehouse”** - an informal venue to make contact with peers and use persuasive writing skills and **Online Discussion Forums and Collaborative Projects**

Grand Conversations – what makes 'em so grand...



Link to Brownlie/SMART Learning/Snow –

- **Many levels of literary conversations** – side by side coaching in the classroom, peer coaching as students write and think, and descriptive feedback in discussion forums
- Students consider and value **multiple perspectives**
- **Students control pace and focus** of their learning
- Students can generate their own thoughtful questions, or respond to those generated by teachers – these questions encourage them to **predict, synthesize, ask questions and draw inferences**

Grand Conversations – what makes ‘em so grand...



- Students **read and read and read** – they are genuinely interested in what other students have to say
- Students care about how they “sound” and whether their work is edited – **the quality of thought is high; written work improves**
- Students can **think and reflect before they write** – this **helps learners** who need more time to respond than a regular classroom discussion affords
- They can complete the forums at home or at school – students therefore have **flexibility and positive self-control of their learning**

Links to Assessment for Learning (Dylan Wiliam, Ruth Sutton, etc)

- Set **criteria** using previous posts as exemplars, and using BC Performance standards in Reading or Writing
- Forums act as **formative assessment** tools/**exemplars**
- Multiple opportunities to edit (60 min), re-post, or re-submit (1st, 2nd, 3rd attempts **show learning!**)
- Lots of side-by-side coaching and **descriptive feedback** by peers and teachers as students write and respond
- **Peer feedback** from other students in the forums is ongoing, relevant and immediate
- **Ownership** - Development of thinking and thoughtful **questions** through natural, literate conversations

Online Literature Circles: Link to BC Performance Standards

Reading

- Accessing prior knowledge
- Creating questions
- Inferencing
- Responding
- Identifying Main idea
- Supporting ideas with details (evidence)

Writing

- Voice and tone suited to audience
- Purpose
- Word Choice
- Organization and sequence
- Use of transitions and conventions of language



Think, Pair, Share – a synectic challenge

- With a copy of the brochure available in print or at www.online.bcelearner.ca or at <http://www.sites.google.com/site/onlineliteraturecircles>

consider what we have seen and heard so far....

- **Think** about Online Literature Circles
- **Talk** to your partner or if you are a virtual participant, to yourself for 2 minutes
- Create a synectic*Online Literature Circles are like San Jose because ...*
- Let's **share** 5 synectics with the group

How to: a step by step guide to Online Lit Circles

1. **Step One** – Find a partner class and teaching colleague.
2. **Step Two** – Choose the literature circle books.
 1. At least one book that every student in the class is able to read
 2. At least one aboriginal text.
 3. Canadian content.
 4. Multicultural character and voice
3. **Step Three** – Set up the structure of the lit circle
4. **Step Four** – Determine learning intentions and connect with discussion forum questions

How to: a step by step guide to Online Lit Circles

6. **Step Six** – Establish Rules and Guidelines
7. **Step Seven** – Orient students to Moodle; guided practice using exemplars or student samples of discussion forum posts
8. **Step Eight** – Set criteria with students
9. **Step Nine** – Practice time – a Coffeehouse, a first howdy-do...start reading...ease into it...
10. **Step Ten** – Reflect and plan for learning

Discussion forum questions should require deep thinking

GRADE 7/8 ONLINE LIT CIRCLE -LUCERNE (New Denver) &
ROSSLAND

TOUCHING SPIRIT BEAR by Ben Mikaelson –

“Trust and Be Trusted”

- *After his experience with the Spirit Bear, Cole struggles with trust. Give two examples from the novel. Do you believe Cole should be trusted now that he has had a near-death experience? Justify your answer with evidence from the novel, and your own personal experiences.*

question written by Gary Parkstrom, Lucerne School, New Denver

Thoughtful questions and complex thinking tasks foster engagement

GRADE 11/12 ONLINE LIT CIRCLE: LV Rogers and New Denver

LAST NIGHT IN MONTREAL by Emily St. Jean Mandel

"she'd been disappearing for so long..."

On page 9, of Last Night in Montreal, the paragraph ends with the line: "she'd been disappearing for so long that she didn't know how to stay". Explain what this line means in terms of the novel's plot, Lilia's character, and this sometimes propensity in human beings to "disappear" in their lives.

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles

- To read other students' discussion forum posts has been interesting ...you get to see how they comprehend the novel. I may seeone thing, when another student may read it as something completely different. For example, I found that there was in fact significance to Pi's name, when other students in the forums did not see it that way.

Amy



Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



- I really enjoy hearing from other people about their thoughts on the book. ...what was good about the Virtual Book Club is that you don't know the other people or their personalities and to hear them speak about the book and have the same opinions as you is really amazing. ...it worked really well hearing from other people because maybe you didn't like or understand a part in the book and you hear what they have to say and it changes your opinion on the book. In my mind, I believe that the whole Virtual Book Club turned out better than I expected.

Darrin

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles

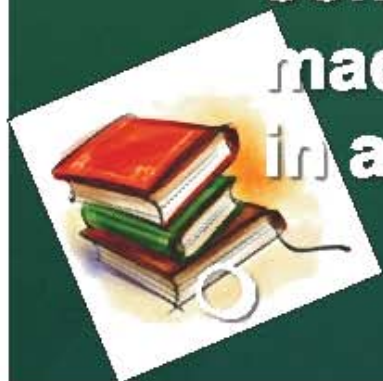
○ It has been a good experience reading other people's posts because it has helped me to understand and see the novel in new or different ways. For instance reading other people's posts on the symbolism of the ducks in the lagoon [in *Catcher in the Rye*] really helped me to get the basis of understanding that I could then start to build my own ideas and philosophies on.



Paul

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles

- For me it really helped to read the other student's posts. It's always good to hear what someone else thinks. It may bring up a thought or something that I had never thought of before. It was a great opportunity to just hear what other people felt and that might have a completely different view on something than you. In a lot of cases it just made me look at the book or parts of the book in a whole different way.**



Erika

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



- It has definitely been a mind opening experience to read the posts ... By reading other peoples' opinions on certain topics of the book I can see things from a new perspective. Issues which I thought only had one meaning turn out to potentially have several different meanings. In addition, by reading another person's opinion a sometimes synergy-like action occurs, where I can view something from a completely new perspective altogether.

Sanjar

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



○ It is very interesting how people think about certain things differently. And ...that it helps me to understand the story better ... Other people's ideas give me more ideas that can improve my reading. I can develop my understanding of the story too. Also, I feel that it's very good to have my OWN opinion about the book.

Sawako



Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles

○It depends. Some people seem so incredibly...dense. Whereas others are deep. It's been a positive experience. It often aids my train of thought in discussing the novel.



Kate

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



○ I notice that I talk more about the book when I read independently ...when you read as a group you know everyone already knows what's going on, but when you read independently, you're able to reflect back to the book and discuss the events that had happened and what you thought about it.

Jessica

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles

- **“I liked that we could think for a day or three to respond to someone”**
- **“I liked that I could type it up at any time of the night. I especially liked that because that is when I am the most creative.”**
- **“... you could really understand more of the novel by listening to other people’s views. They could make you think of something in a way you didn’t see it before.”**



Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



- **"I liked that I had time to brainstorm and put my best thoughts into it, and see others."**
- **"It helped with my fear of public speaking"**
- **"It was good because you could actually THINK about answers before you blurt them out"**
- **"... you didn't get put on the spot and have to be quick on your feet"**
- **"It was fun and original being able to talk to other people I don't know about our thoughts on things"**
- **"I really enjoy debate and this was just like that"**

Student Reflections – Learning in Online Lit Circles



- **“I thought this was an awesome way to do a novel study, way better than a booklet of questions, an essay or an oral report”**
- **“I liked the relaxed atmosphere... I think it brings people closer together.”**
- **“There was less paperwork to lose”**
- **“I enjoyed the freedom of speech”**
- **“The Book Club was wonderful. I loved it!”**

Lessons Learned

- **Establish rules and guidelines for appropriate language and tone in digital learning environments**
- **Teach students the contrast between MSN-speak and formal English**
- **Figure out computer access issues at your site**
- **Plan the numbers – 2 classes is ideal – 60 max**
- **Disable messaging feature in Moodle configuration menu**
- **Use chats synchronously for group projects; augment Moodle with other online technologies in collaborative group work**



How can you connect?

- **Network** – Find professional partners for collaboration in online literature circles

- **ET4OL social networking opportunities** - FB and Twitter



- **Whip around** --- a word or phrase ...

- Your connections/wonderings/aha's about Online Lit Circles?

- Your next step?

Thanks!
For more information...

Contact:

Terry Taylor

UBC-WKTEP Instructor

Literacy Coordinator, School District 10

Teacher, Lucerne School

ttaylor@sd10.bc.ca