



A Beginner's Guide to Learning Circles

Chapter 2

Circles and communities of practice.

available at www.nald.ca/learningcircles/bg.htm

by Tracey Mollins with notes from Janice Brant, Arthur Bull and Guy Ewing

Here is what Etienne Wenger has to say about why circles are important for people:

We are essentially social beings.
We live in societies, of course;
but more fundamentally perhaps,
it is our participation in social communities
and cultural practices
that provides the very materials out of which
we construct who we are,
give meaning to what we do,
and understand what we know.



Etienne Wenger,
“Communities of practice: where learning happens”,
Benchmark Magazine, Fall Issue 1991

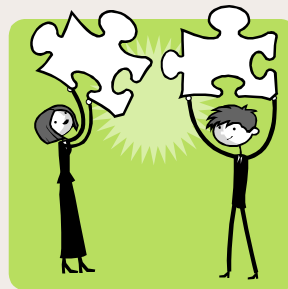
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And here is some more from Etienne:

As valuable as information is, information by itself is meaningless—as are the sounds of an unknown foreign language.

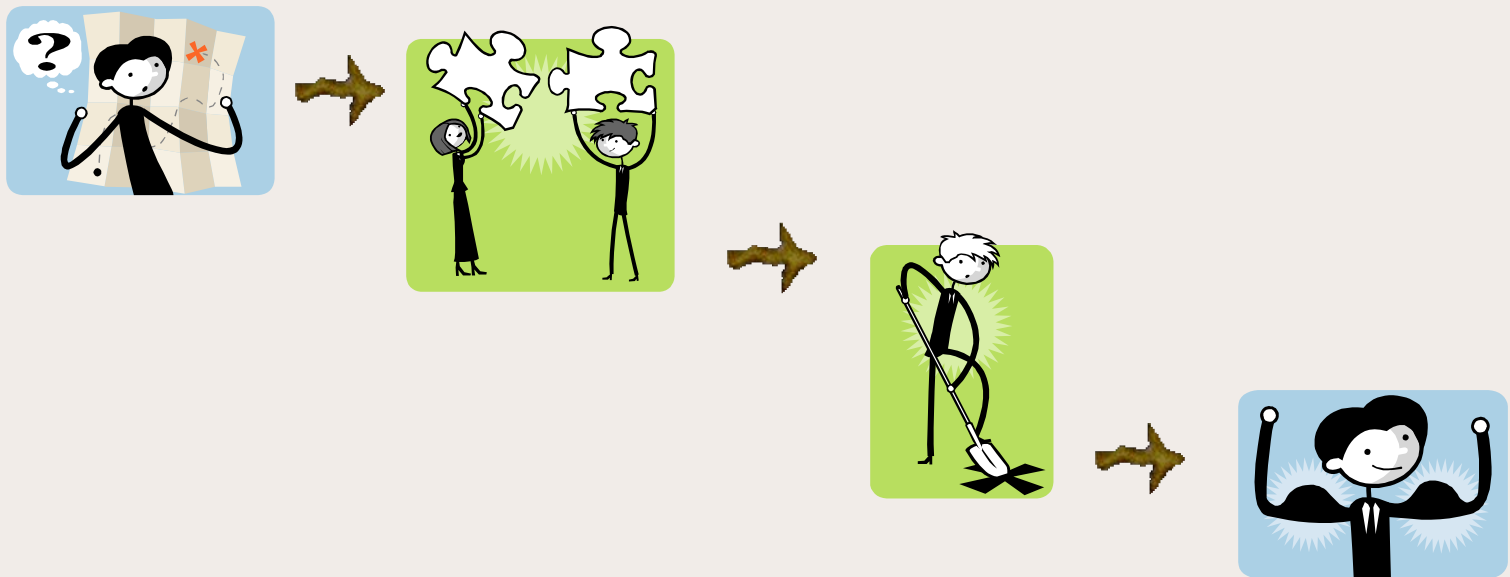


Information only takes meaning in the context of the social practices of the communities that give it cultural life.



And more ...

It is therefore through our membership in these communities that we come to know—and to be empowered by what we know.



And ...

In fact, isolation as a principle
is either illusory or paralyzing
—except perhaps when it is part and parcel of the
practice of communities
that give it a social
meaning,
as in monastic seclusion
or in the process of writing.
Our very identity of individuality
is a matter of belonging.



Etienne Wenger,
“Communities of practice: where learning happens”,
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Are there good circles and bad circles?

In Sweden,
where there is a commitment
to adult education and learning circles of all kinds,
a “virtuous circle” has been created
where all citizens are
encouraged and empowered
in a variety of ways
to participate in public life.



In countries where knowledge and wealth are divided
unequally between an elite and the rest of the population,
“vicious circles” are created .



Henry Milner

Milner, H. (2002).
Civic literacy: How informed citizens make democracy work.
Hanover: University Press of New England.