Institute of Policy Studies

SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN | Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities

toteboard Giving Hope. Improving Lives.

# Future-Ready Society Conference

Peers, Places and Platforms – the Future of Empowered Communities

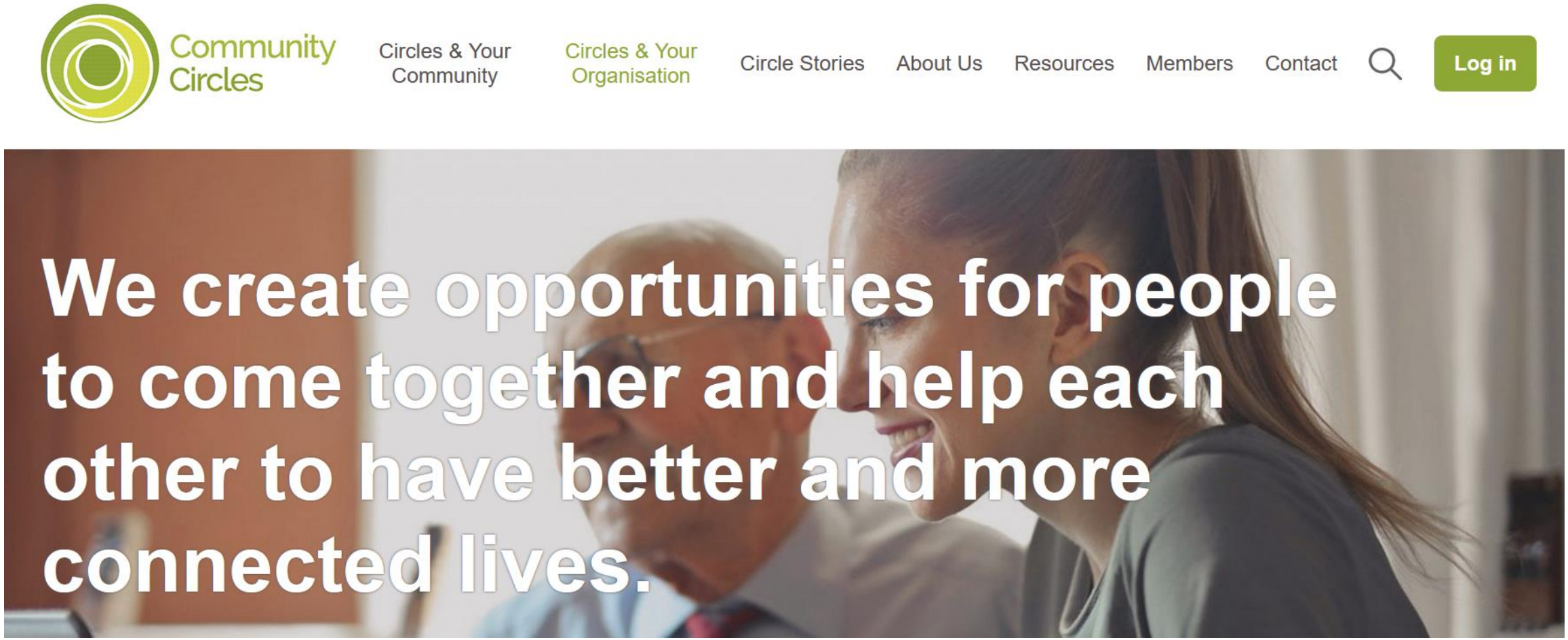
# Power of Peer-to-Peer Approaches

## The Small Group as the Unit of Transformation

*Dr Justin Lee*
*Head, Policy Lab*
*Institute of Policy Studies*

# COMMUNITY CIRCLES

# Community Circles UK



# What are Community Circles?

- Community Circles involves the formation of a small group of people (volunteers, neighbours, friends etc) around someone who needs some help or wants to make a change in their lives.
- Circles have been used to provide social support for seniors with chronic health conditions, people with disabilities etc.
- They have been used across a wide range of purposes, such as helping people cope with cancer, forge better relationships or even just to try new experiences.

# Distinctive Features

- The person receiving support articulates their *longer-term goals* and *ad hoc needs* then the group discusses how they can help and distributes the tasks.
- Circle of support is made up of a small group (≈5-7 pax).
- Facilitated and structured: routine meet-ups; tasks distributed to individuals; actions reviewed.

# Comparing Models of Care

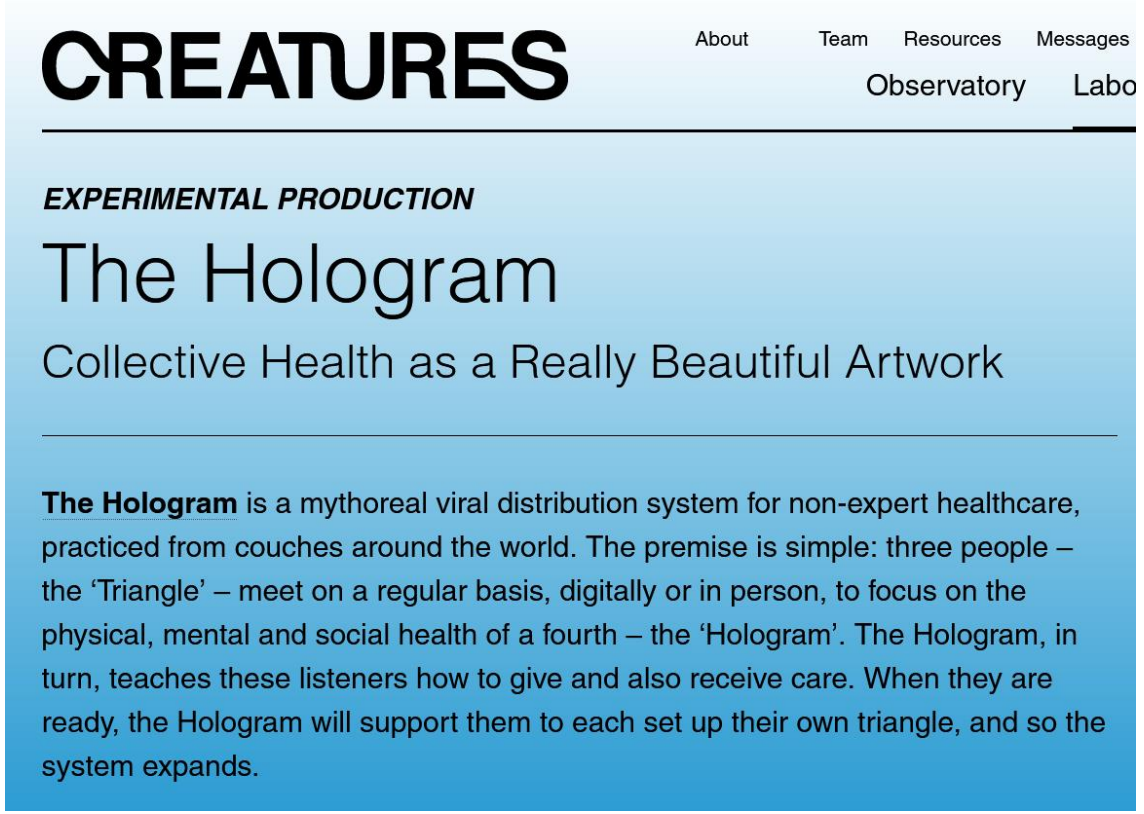
| Type of support | Benefits | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| Caregiver | Intimate kinship support | Burden of care on kin / family |
| Professional Help | Expert knowledge that family or volunteers may not have | Professional distance, more transactional |
| Befriending | Informal support and relationship with a volunteer | Responsibility of support on one person |
| Peer Support | Mutual support amongst those with shared experience, emotional connection & acceptance | Lack diversity of group experiences, skills and resources |
| **Community Circles** | Structured and action-orientated, distributed responsibilities; diversity brings strengths | Less emotional investment or frequency of support? Lack professional expertise? |

# Significance

- Circles allows a person to identify goals meaningful to them while bringing in a broader range of skills/resources from an informal group beyond what the primary caregiver or existing social network can offer. It also distributes the responsibilities of care to a community without over-reliance on any single person.
- Benefits of lateral relationships among participants.
- A kind of '**structured kampung**' where neighbourliness and focused help is semi-formally organized instead of totally self-organised?

# Potential for Viral Means of Social Change

- Artist-led ‘social technology’ designed to provide mutual support and non-expert healthcare
- Three people meet on a regular basis to focus on the physical, mental and social health of a fourth. The fourth, in turn, teaches these listeners how to give and also receive care.
- When they are ready, the fourth will support them to each set up their own triangle, and so the system expands




Creative Practices for Transformational Futures – EU funded research project

# GIVING CIRCLES

# What are Giving Circles

- Mobilize ≈5-7 families to give money directly and top up the income of a family with lesser means to a minimum level required to provide financial stability.
- Option to add on informal social support like what Community Circles does.

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# 'No one has helped us so much before,' says sole caregiver of ailing husband and son with autism

(From left) Madam Annie Chang and her son Kelvin with Ms Lee Siew Yian, a senior manager at NVPC, with a laptop that was donated by a friend of Ms Lee. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

# Significance

- Democratise Philanthropy
  - Don’t need to be rich to give meaningfully
  - Direct giving and connection
- De-professionalise (or Humanise) Social Support
  - Flexibly fill in gaps of social services (communities can & should be as generous as they want to be)
  - Less conditional support (instead of “we’ll help you, but we need to fix you” requirement)
- Finding Balance between Consumerism & Compassion
  - E.g. Peter Singer 1972 "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

# LEARNING CIRCLES

# Background

- IPS is working with SINDA in a ‘learning by doing’ phase.
- Base concept emerged out of a Design Thinking process in Beyond Social Services.
- We are interested to pilot various possible ‘versions’ of it with diverse partners to see what works for whom, and under what conditions.

# The Larger Problem

- **Students don't enjoy learning**, see school as a necessary stepping-stone to work and life they want.
- **Tuition** is billion-dollar industry, profiting from an educational ecosystem where teachers' role in school is no longer regarded as enough to get ahead.
- **Parents** learn curriculum to teach their children and pay good money for tuition; recreating more 'school' at home.

# Exacerbated for the working class

- Culture of school marginalizes life experience of kids from working-class families.
- Tuition is costly.
- Working parents may not have luxury or ability to coach and supervise kids.

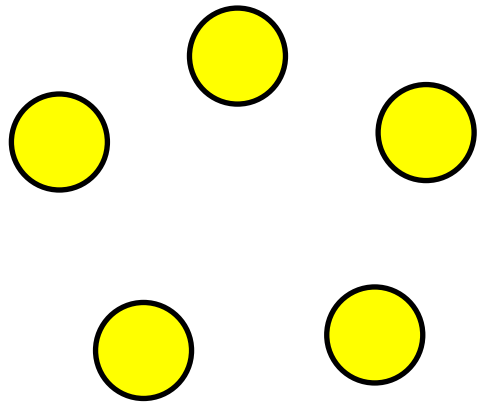
# What we have learned (so far) about what works…

1. Learning by Teaching / Doing where possible.
2. Let youths set their own learning goals & plan their curriculum where possible.
3. Peer and collaborative learning should be encouraged, and groups that feel like they are in the same boat might help each other perform better than individual effort alone.
4. Intrinsic motivation instead of extrinsic rewards to cultivate interest in learning.

# The Concept – ‘Learning Circles’

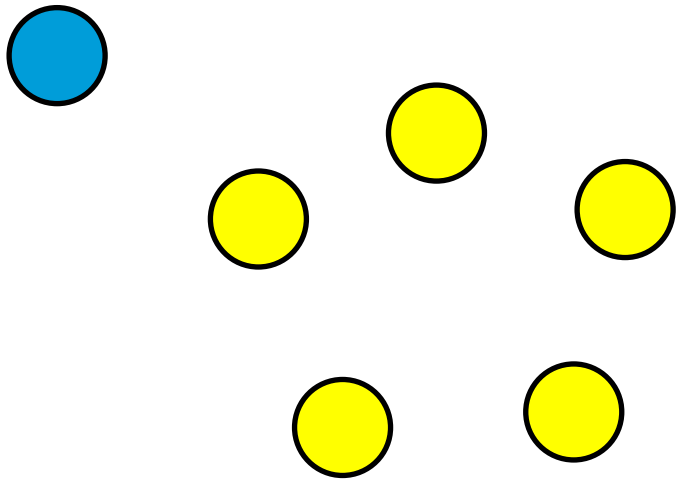
Self-directed, peer learning groups who are supported by a community made up of volunteers who do not teach, but instead provide academic resources and learning guidance; and willing neighbours who simply provide space, wi-fi, refreshments and emotional support if needed.

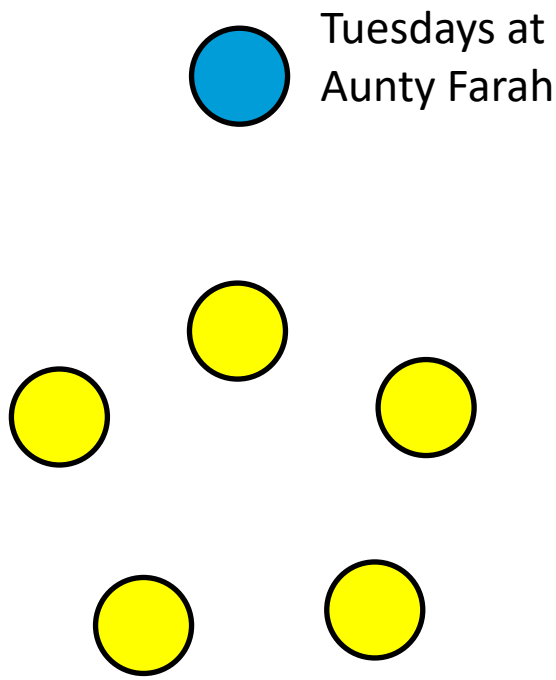
A ‘study group’ is formed, let’s say out of 5 youths, with the  understanding that they will help one another learn.

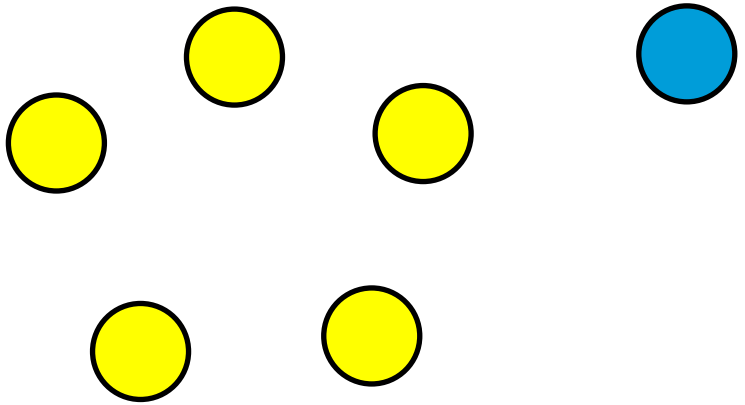


Learning goals are set by the group, and planning can be assisted through facilitation.

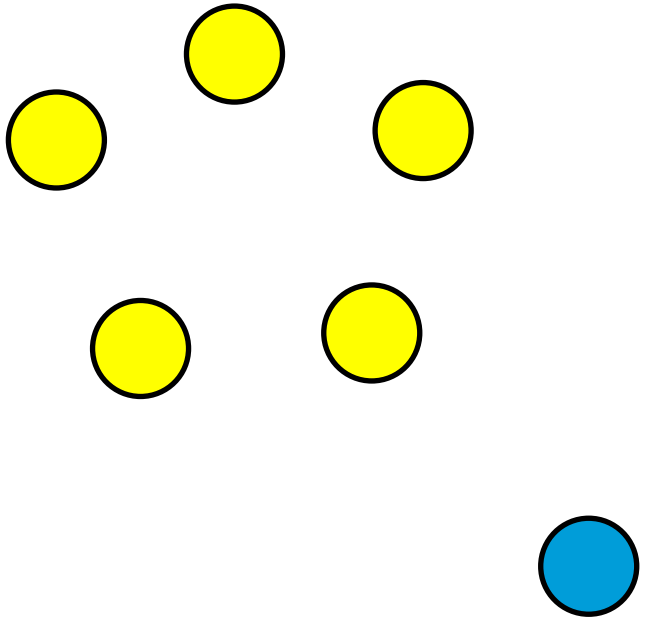
Mondays at Uncle Tan




Tuesdays at
Aunty Farah

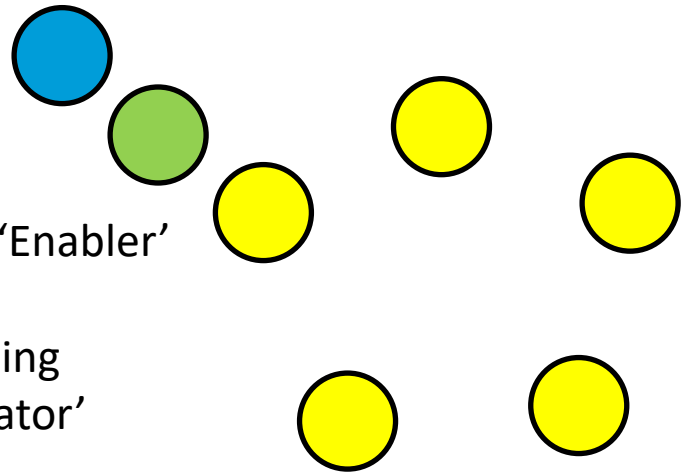


Wednesdays
at Aunty Priya

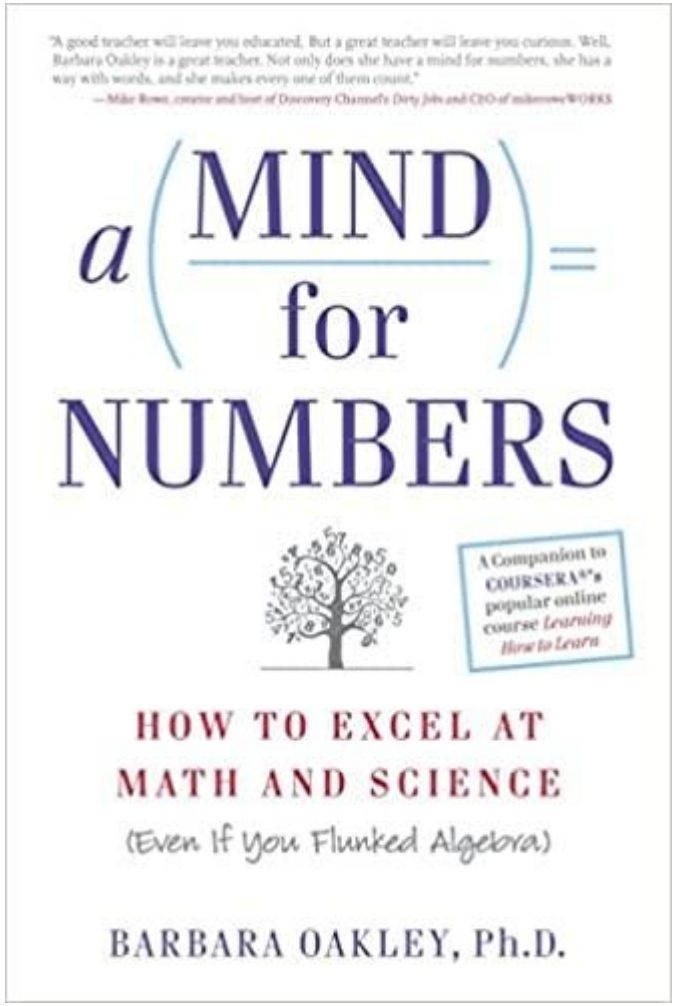


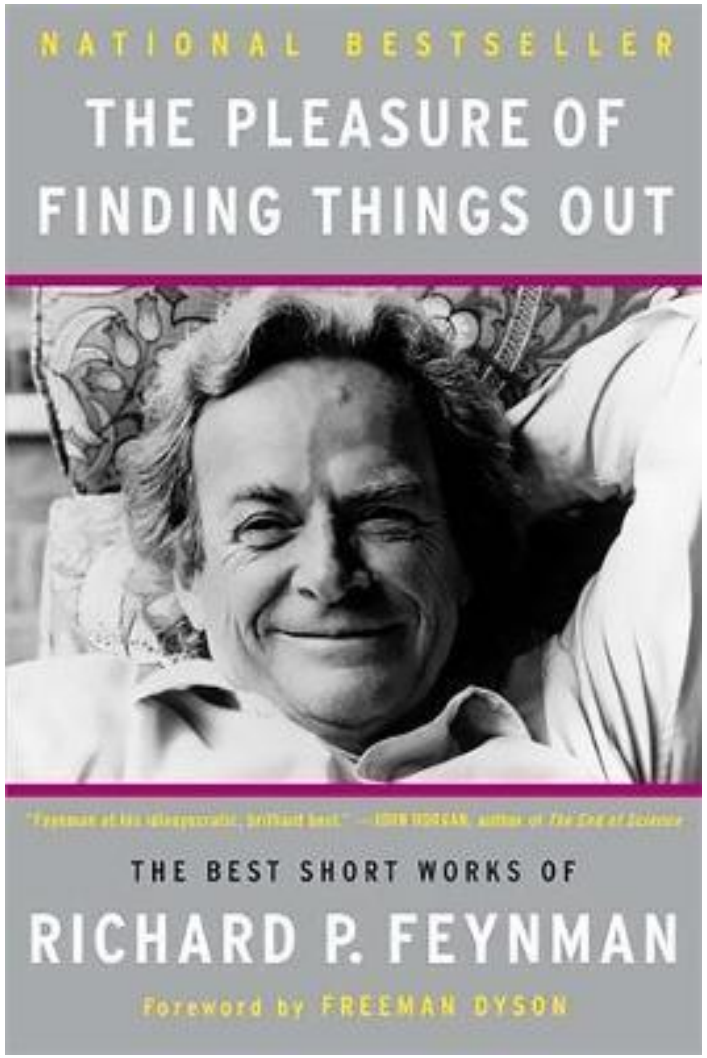
Thursdays at
Mdm Lim

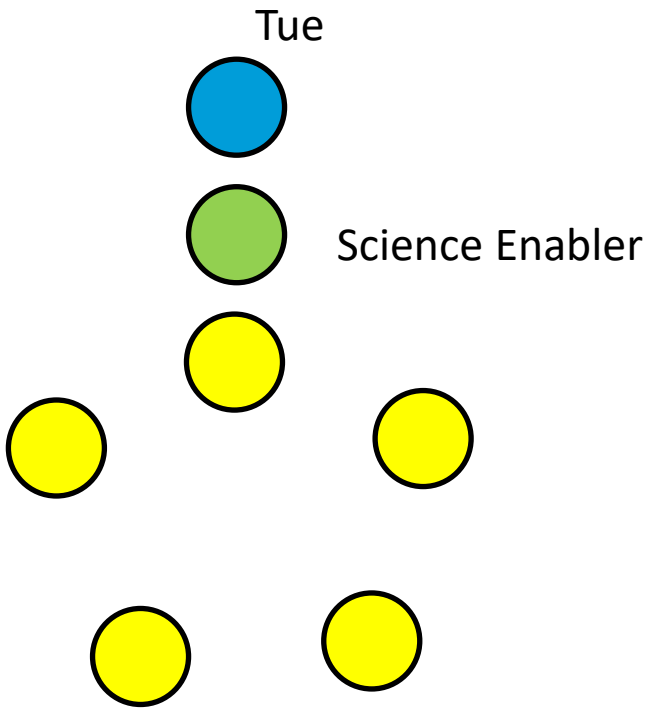
Mon



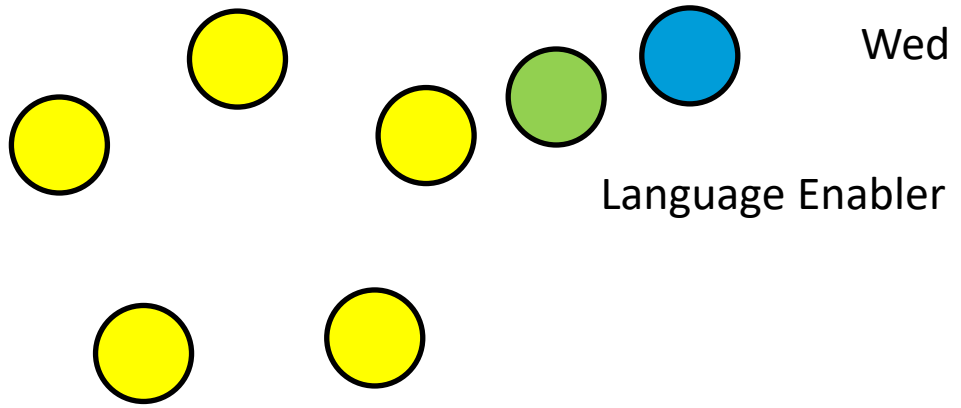
Math ‘Enabler’
or
‘Learning
Facilitator’




NATIONAL BESTSELLER
THE PLEASURE OF FINDING THINGS OUT
THE BEST SHORT WORKS OF
RICHARD P. FEYNMAN
Foreword by FREEMAN DYSON


Tue
Science Enabler

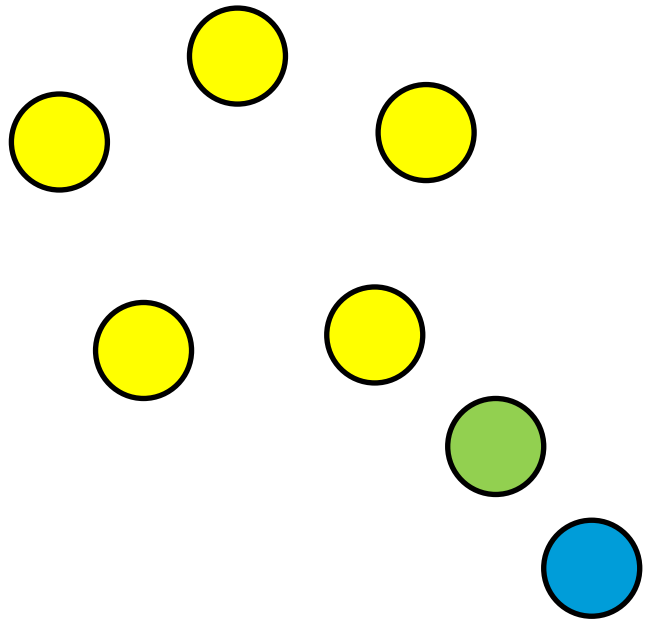
The enablers focus on making academic resources available for self or peer learning and providing guidance on ‘learning how to learn’ rather than ‘teaching’ the subjects.



These might be **topics not in the school curriculum** that the students are interested in E.g. Gender inequality, climate change, how to build an online business etc.

It can also be about **issues faced by their community** so that it becomes problem-based learning to address community challenges. E.g. Drug peddlers in the neighbourhood, racial discrimination, illegal money lending.

Possibly, you can find volunteers (beyond the existing enablers) who have the relevant experience guide the students for these niche topics.



Self-Directed Projects / Community-based Curriculum

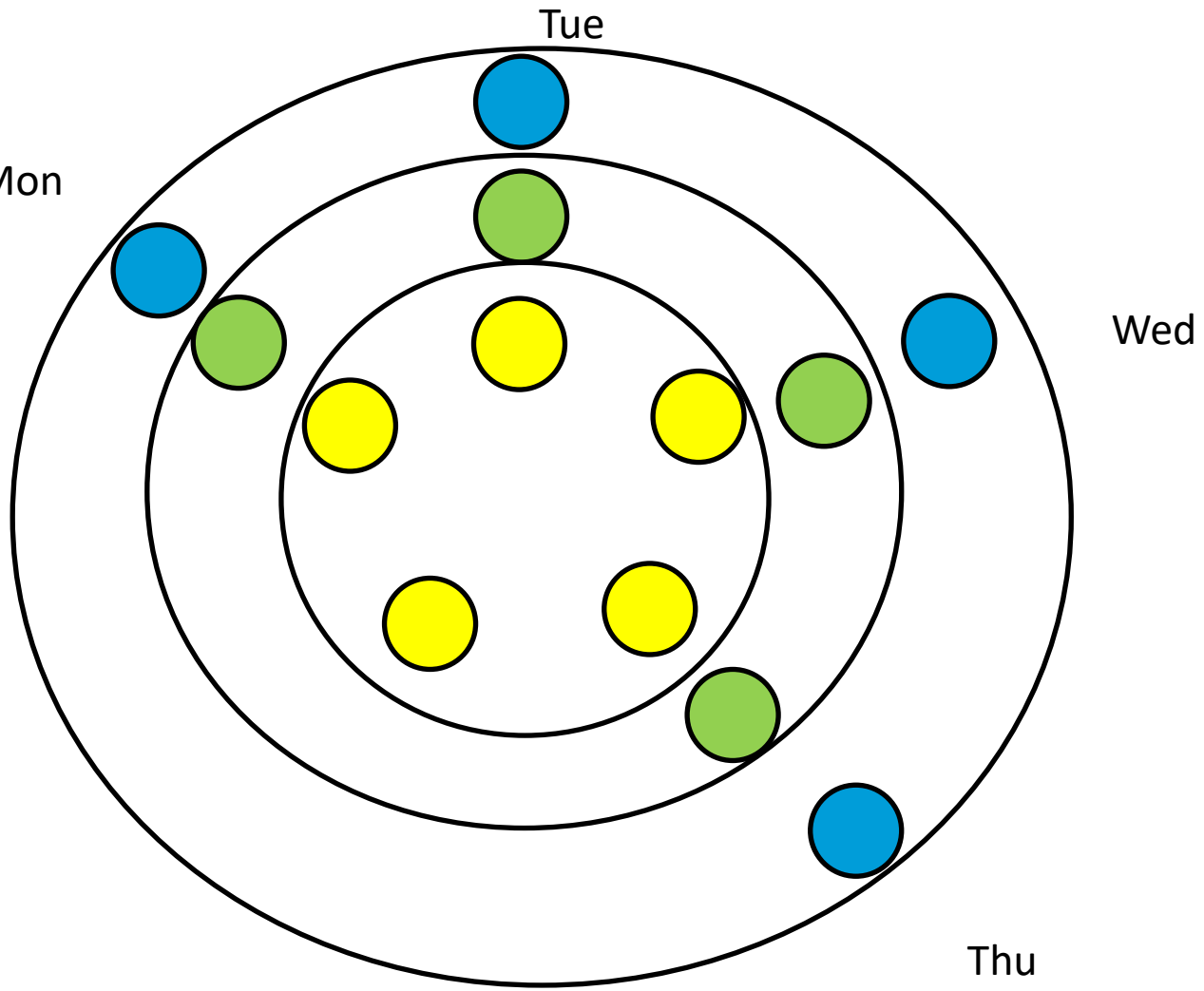
Thu

**Study Group**

**Learning Enablers**

**Neighbourhood Hosts**

**= Learning Circle**



# Possible structure of sessions

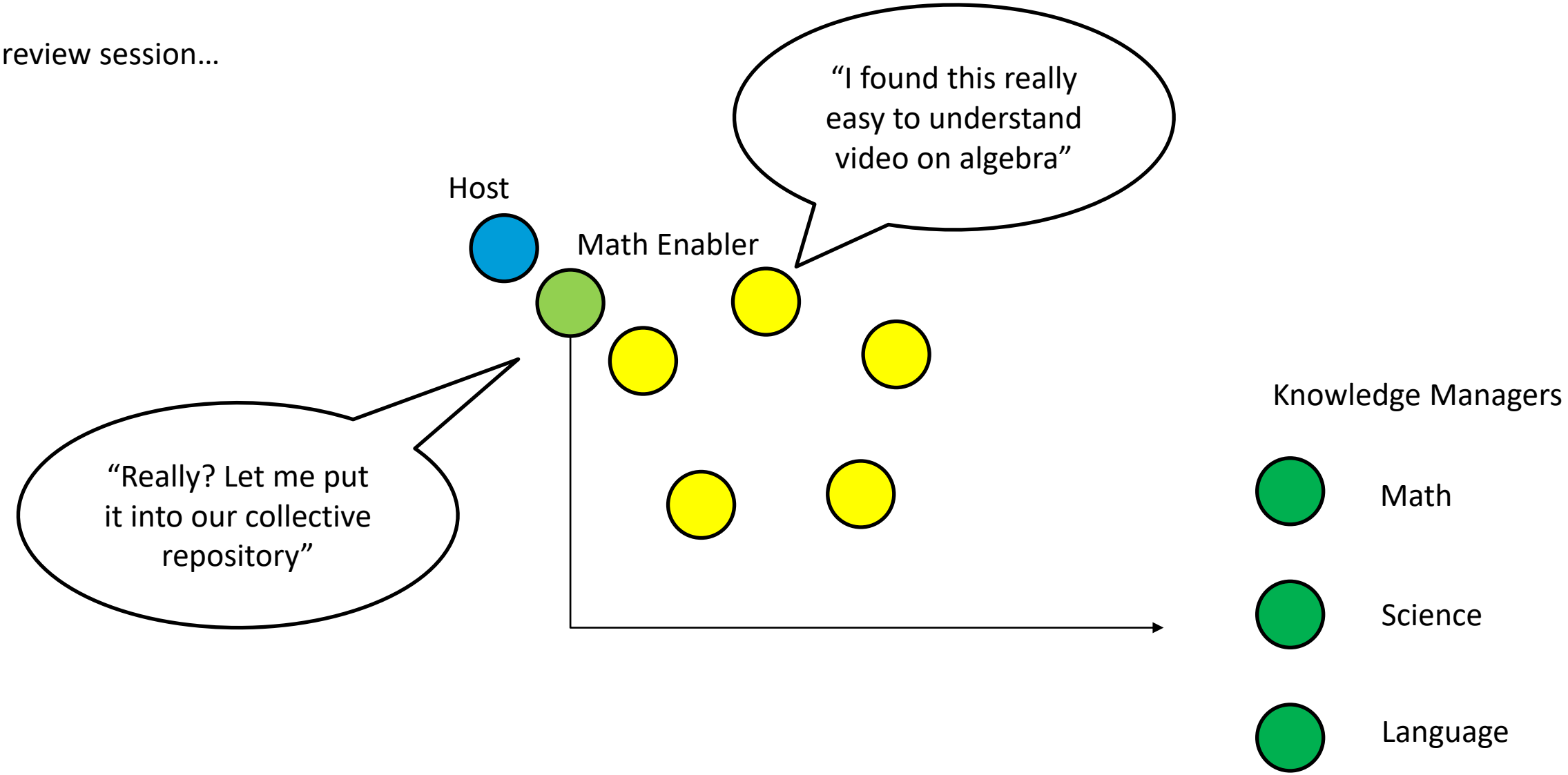
Host opens up home, makes space, gives access to wifi, serves biscuits & tea

1. Check-ins
2. Agenda & goal setting
3. Peer learning (as first principle)
4. Review / reflection

Host can join in

Host can join in

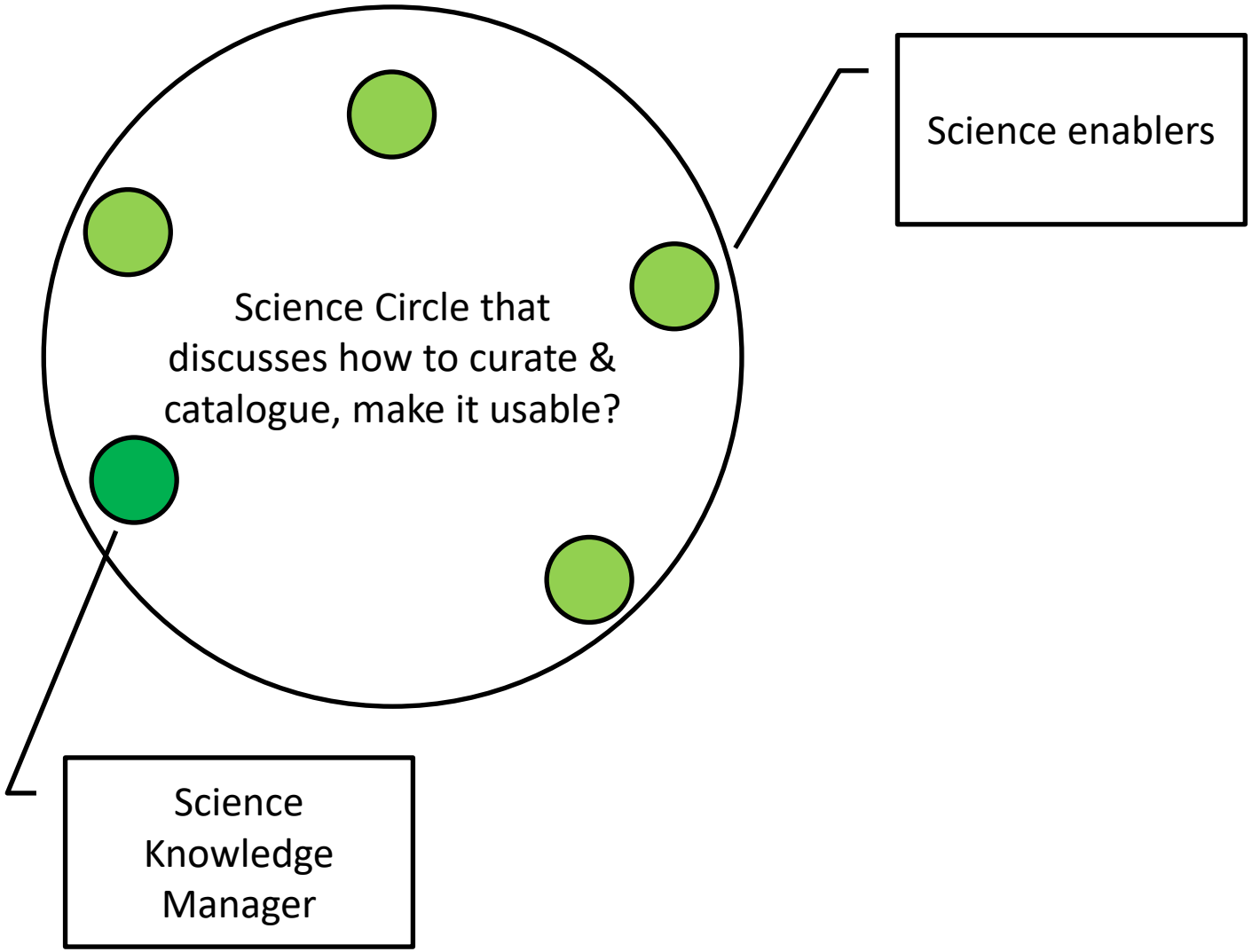
At review session…

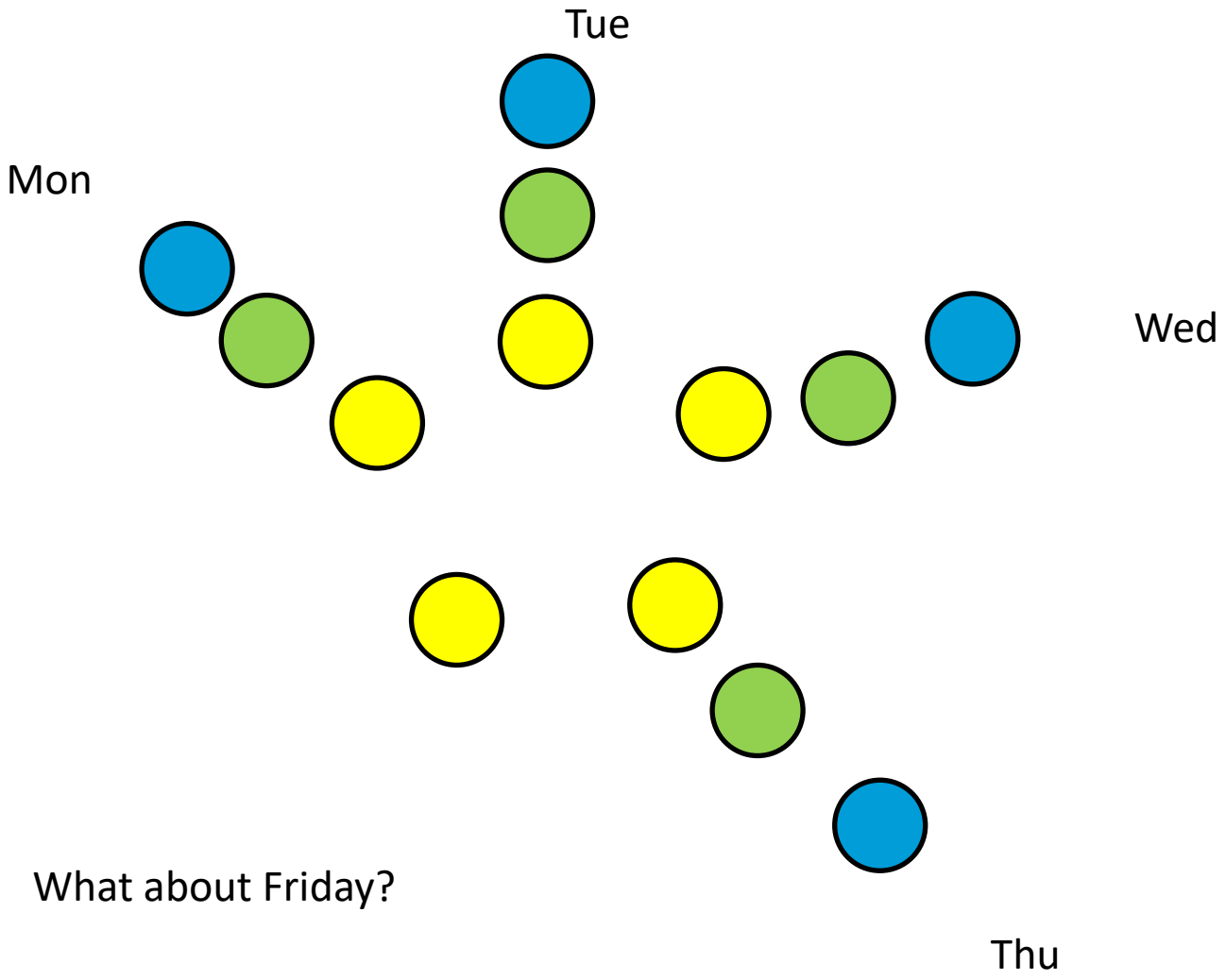


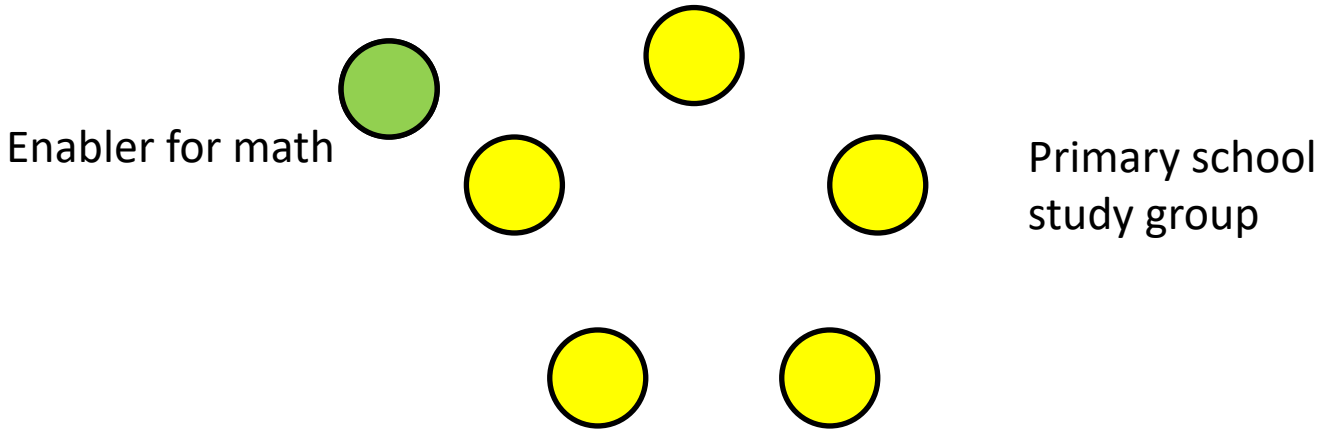

Job is to curate, accumulate and design knowledge base so that it is easy to access and use

**Contributing to the Knowledge Commons** – Supporting Self-Organised Learning Environments

**Local action, but open and connected to one another**




Tue
Mon
Wed
What about Friday?
Thu

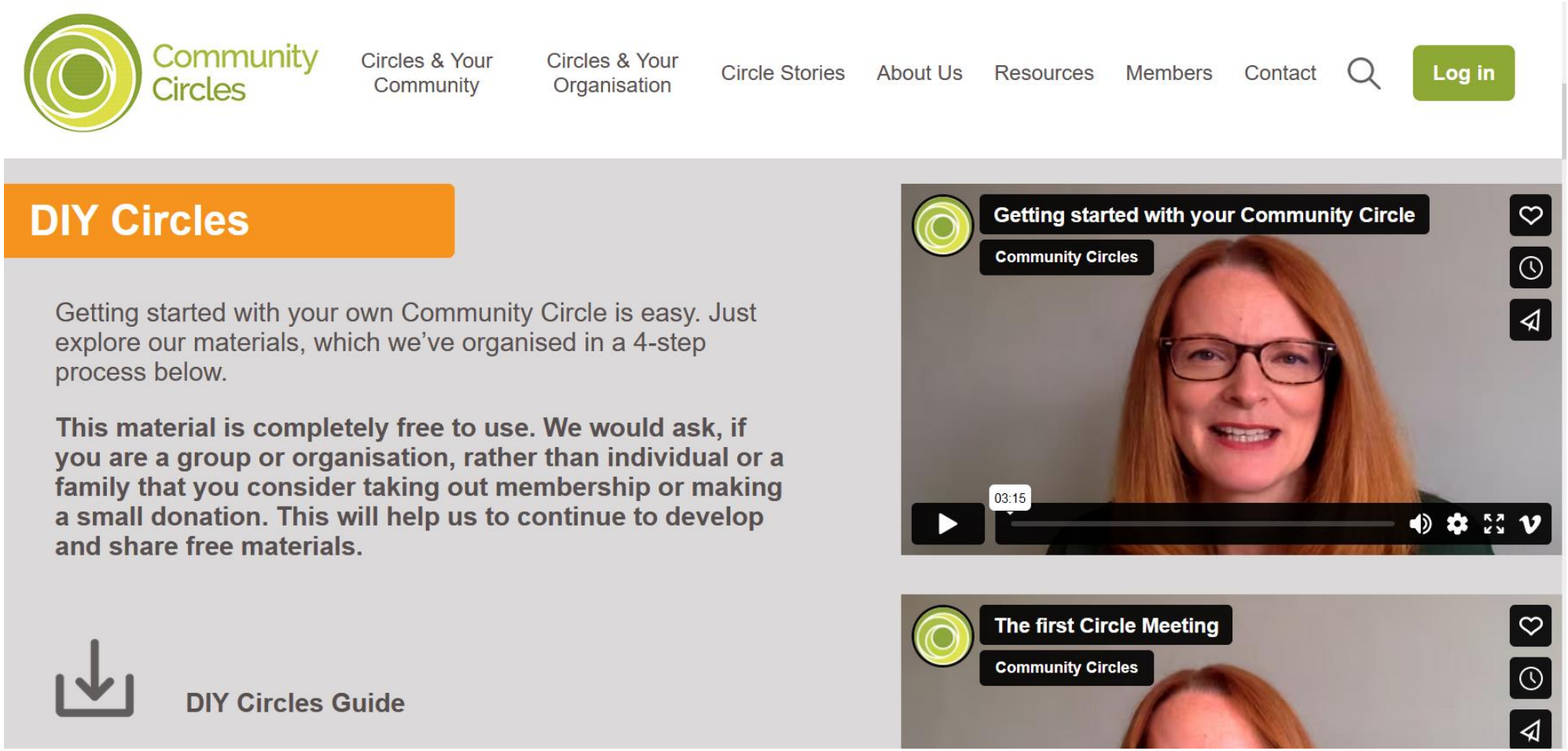

Enabler for math
Primary school study group

# Significance

- Balance academic curriculum with opportunity for self-directed learning with peers.
  - Set own learning goals relevant to own life and experience.
  - Allow more diverse set of learning interests to be explored.
- Structured circle of support that distributes responsibilities so that volunteers from the community more likely to step up.
  - Just from this design, we have added 8 adults that are (hopefully) positive influences to the lives of these youth.
- Mutually supportive—not just to own study group but also other circles; contributes to collective knowledge base.

| Issue | State | Market | Service Provision | Community Building / Mutual Aid | Commons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SOCIAL CARE** | Public Services | Private Care | Professional services in FSCs, SSAs | Peer support<br><br>Community Circles | DIY Community Circles |
| **INCOME** | Financial Assistance | Employment & Economic Growth | Job support, coaching, placement | Worker-owned Co-ops<br><br>Giving Circles | Basic Income |
| **EDUCATION** | Public Schools | Private Schools<br>Private Tuition | Subsidised or Volunteer Tutors | Democratic Schools, Peer-to-Peer Learning | Open Education Resources |

# DIY Community Circles



| Issue | State | Market | Service Provision | Community Building / Mutual Aid | Commons |
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# THANK YOU