

NCSALL Study Circle Guide: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education

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The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's
Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network

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Introduction to the Study Circle Guide

This Study Circle guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) as part of the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN). The guide is part of NCSALL's effort to help link research to practice in the field of adult basic education and adult literacy.

We hope that these Study Circle guides will serve three purposes:

- (1) to help staff developers and practitioners to organize and conduct Study Circles that help practitioners to read, discuss and use research to improve their practice;
- (2) to generate recommendations and practical suggestions for other practitioners about how to translate research into practice; and
- (3) to generate feedback and information for NCSALL staff and researchers about how research can be more helpful to those who work in adult literacy programs.

The guide is intended for use by staff developers and practitioners who want to facilitate Study Circles on the topics that NCSALL researches. The guide is divided into the following parts:

1. Goal of NCSALL Study Circles
2. Tips for Study Circles
3. Session Guide for Facilitating the Study Circle
4. Study Circle Readings and Handouts
5. Study Circle Resource Center Materials
6. Feedback Form for NCSALL

We welcome your comments and advice on how to improve and distribute information about NCSALL's research and about how to support those who seek to use and produce research that can benefit the field.

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Information About NCSALL

The Mission of NCSALL:

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) will pursue basic and applied research in the field of adult basic education; build partnerships between researchers and practitioners; disseminate research and best practices to practitioners, scholars and policy makers; and work with the field to develop a comprehensive research agenda.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and World Education. The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University are NCSALL's partners. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and OERI's National Institute for Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning.

NCSALL's Research Projects:

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English to Speakers of Other Language, and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner motivation, (2) classroom practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (3) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative:

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that the results of research reach practitioners, administrators, policy makers, and scholars of adult education. NCSALL publishes a quarterly magazine entitled *Focus on Basics*; an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research and best practices entitled *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*; and periodic research reports and articles entitled *NCSALL Reports*. NCSALL also sponsors the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network, designed to link practitioners and researchers and to help practitioners apply findings from research in their classrooms and programs. NCSALL also has a web site:

<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall>

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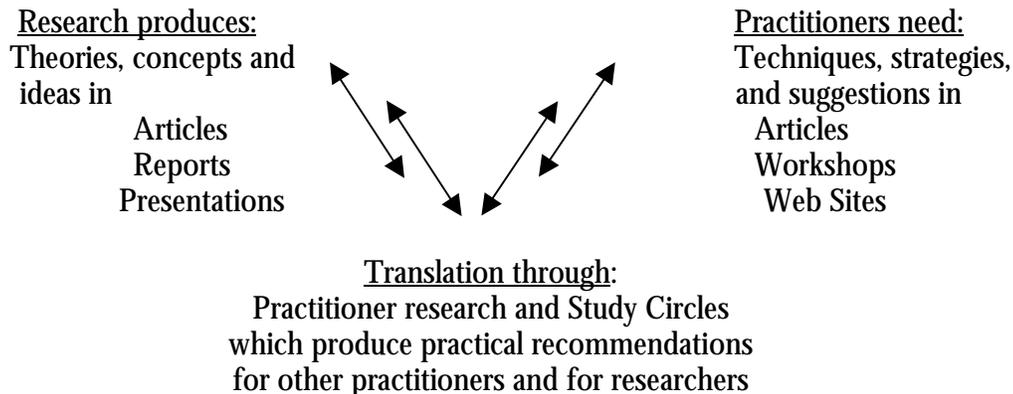
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Goal of NCSALL Study Circles

The goal of NCSALL is to improve the quality of practice in adult basic education through research (both university-based and practitioner research). We want to ensure that practitioners--teachers, counselors, program administrators, and others--have an opportunity to learn about and use, where appropriate, the results of research in their work. Therefore, the goal of the NCSALL Study Circles is to help adult basic education practitioners learn about theories and concepts related to or coming out of NCSALL's research and discuss how such concepts can be applied to practice and policy in adult basic education.

Getting practitioners involved in reading and thinking about the uses of research in their practice is important for ensuring that research is actually influencing practice. When we have talked to practitioners in the field of adult literacy about what they need research to do for them, we hear that they need techniques, strategies, and practical suggestions that they can use immediately. Yet, research often produces reports, articles, and other documents that provide primarily theories, concepts, ideas and sometimes implications for practice.

NCSALL feels that there needs to be a process that "translates" theoretical concepts into practical suggestions, and that practitioners should be involved in that process. The prime vehicles for translating research theories into practical suggestions for practitioners (or feedback for university-based researchers) are activities such as practitioner research and Study Circles where practitioners can learn about, discuss and/or try out ideas from research. The following diagram depicts this process:



NCSALL believes that it needs to do more than publish and disseminate magazines, reports and research updates if research is to inform practice and policy. We have a responsibility to help design and sponsor "live" mechanisms, such as this Study Circle, for practitioners to really read, think, and talk about what research findings mean and whether they are useful or applicable to adult basic education classrooms and programs.

That is why we are promoting, through these guides, Study Circles for practitioners to come together, read and discuss research on topics related to NCSALL's research. We hope that these Study Circles can generate practical strategies or recommendations for other adult basic education practitioners or feedback for researchers about how the research could be made more useful for practitioners.

In Day 3, we provide some suggestions for helping participants to generate either recommendations for fellow practitioners in your state or recommendations/feedback for NCSALL researchers, and that these recommendations will be shared with other practitioners in your state and/or sent to NCSALL.

In this way, we hope that the process of translating research into practice will become more concrete, with practitioners playing a vital role in making research results useful to fellow practitioners.

We welcome feedback from you about how the NCSALL Study Circle Guides work as part of this process, and how they can be improved. In Appendix E, you'll find a "Feedback Form for NCSALL". We hope you'll take a moment after running your Study Circle to fill it out and send it to us. Or, call us and talk to us about how it went. Thanks for being part of the research-to-practice and practice-to-research process.

Tips for Study Circles

Who should participate?

The Study Circles are designed for any practitioners who work in adult basic education programs: teachers, program directors, counselors, volunteers, or others. Most of the Study Circles deal with topics that are broad enough to be of interest to ABE, GED and ESOL practitioners in a variety of delivery settings: community-based organizations, local educational authorities, libraries, correctional facilities, etc. The design of the Study Circle, and the readings, should be appropriate for both new and experienced practitioners, but some of the readings may have common or new acronyms that could be reviewed with all participants.

The Study Circle is designed for approximately 8 participants; we don't recommend running a Study Circle with less than 5 or more than 10 people, as discussions are harder to facilitate with too few or too many participants.

How long is the Study Circle?

Each Study Circle is designed for nine hours, divided into three sessions of three hours. The Study Circle could be longer, depending on the participants' interests, with more meetings among the participants themselves. If participants want to keep meeting on their own, finding and selecting their own readings on the topic, they can set that up during the last session.

How do I recruit participants?

NCSALL has produced a sample flyer that provides information about this NCSALL Study Circle. That flyer is included at the end of this Study Circle Guide in Appendix A. The flyer presents an overview of the topic and a brief description about what will be covered in each of the three sessions, along with a registration form for practitioners to mail back to you.

You are welcome to use the flyer as is to send out to practitioners via mail or on a web site to let practitioners know when and where the Study Circle will be taking place. Or, you can create your own flyer to send out to practitioners, using the NCSALL flyer as an example.

There are two ways to select dates for the Study Circle: (1) select all three dates at the very beginning and advertise all three in the recruitment flyer, or (2) select and advertise the first date and hope that you can set the second and third dates with all participants during the first meeting of the Study Circle. In general, we recommend the first option, since it is sometimes difficult (if not impossible) for even a small group of people to find a common date once they are together. If all three dates are set from the beginning, only people who can make all three dates will, in all likelihood, sign up to attend the Study Circle.

In general, it's best to have the three dates regularized (e.g., all on Tuesday nights, or all on Friday mornings), as someone who is free at a certain time of week is more likely to have that same time free every week.

How do I organize the first session?

When you feel that you have solid commitments from the number of participants you are seeking, call or otherwise contact them to confirm with them that they are “in” the Study Circle. At this time, reconfirm the times, dates and location of the Study Circle with the participants.

This Study Circle, like the other NCSALL Study Circles, has been designed for a group of practitioners to meet over three sessions, with each session being 3 hours long. Because that is a fairly short period of time for a group to meet, we are suggesting that a small number of very short readings and brief cover letter with information about the Study Circle be sent to practitioners to read over before the first meeting.

So, after confirming their participation, send each participant the packet of information and materials to read before the first meeting (“Study Circle Pre-meeting Packet of Readings and Handouts” in Appendix B).

Practitioners who will be attending the Study Circle need to receive this packet at least 10 days before the first meeting of the Study Circle.

You, as the facilitator, will also want to read over the packet so that you are ready for the first session and for questions that participants may have.

The pre-meeting packet for the Performance Accountability Study Circle includes (all, except the folder, found in Appendix B):

1. Folder for holding Performance Accountability Study Circle Readings and Handouts
2. Cover letter: *Information about the Performance Accountability Study Circle*
3. *What is a Study Circle?* by Study Circles Resource Center (Handout #1)
4. *What Study Circles are, and are not: A Comparison* by SCRC (Handout #2)
5. *The role of the participant* by SCRC (Handout #3)
6. Reading #1: *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education* by Juliet Merrifield

The packet should also include a NCSALL brochure and a PDRN brochure, which you will find accompanying this *NCSALL Study Circle Guide*.

For the first session, be sure that you arrive early in order to set up the chairs (in a circle), arrange your newsprint, organize handouts, pens, tapes, etc. It's always nice to have some

sort of refreshment (such as juice, coffee or water), even in a three-hour session. Check out where the restrooms are, so you can tell participants, and make sure the heating or cooling is appropriate. ALWAYS bring extra copies of the readings (at least 2 or 3) for those participants who forget to bring their own. You may also want to have (or start during the meeting) a list of participants and their phone numbers or e-mail addresses, so that participants can contact one another on their own during the course of the Study Circle.

What advice do you have for facilitating a Study Circle?

The Study Circle Resource Center in Pomfret, Connecticut, is the expert resource in conducting Study Circles. Their handouts on facilitation are so good that we at NCSALL didn't see the point of trying to write our own. We include some of their readings and advice in Appendix D. We thank them for their guidance in facilitating Study Circles.

What should the outcomes of the Study Circle be?

First and foremost, we hope that practitioners learn more about the topic, gain knowledge about the research on the topic, and come away with ideas for how to put some of that knowledge into practice.

Secondly, we hope that the Study Circle group is able to generate practical ideas or recommendations for teaching and program practice that can be disseminated either to other practitioners, to researchers, or to both, about what they learned in the Study Circle. The purpose for trying to generate ideas as a part of the Study Circle is to play a role in the larger process of "translating" research into practice by documenting the practical suggestions or recommendations that come out of the Study Circle when practitioners talk about how theories, concepts and ideas from research can be used in their classrooms and programs.

We have also found that some Study Circles are richer when there is a "task" for the group involved. Some people and groups like the idea of having a concrete outcome (such as a list of teaching strategies related to the research concepts), because it makes them feel that the Study Circle is not simple discussion with no action.

Here is only a short list of some possible ways that a Study Circle group could generate and document their ideas; your group may, of course, come up with other ways.

- A list of strategies or practical suggestions for applying the research theory in adult basic education classrooms. These strategies or suggestions could be techniques, approaches, or other types of classroom activities that incorporate research theories or concepts.
- Text describing 2-3 practical suggestions (techniques, approaches, etc.), written for fellow practitioners. This text could be anywhere from several short paragraphs to 1-2 pages.
- A list of points, written to the researcher, critiquing the research or otherwise giving the researcher feedback about how the theories are or are not appropriate for adult literacy practice.

- A letter to the researcher, providing feedback about the research or asking for further information.
- A list or description of further research that would be useful to practitioners in the field on the topic.
- An action plan that the group develops together for how they intend to put into practice some of the things they have learned during the Study Circle.

During the third session of the Study Circle, there will be steps in the guide to help you and your group generate practical ideas that can be shared with other practitioners or researchers. A simple brainstorm may be sufficient to generate practical suggestions about how concepts could be used in the classroom. Or you could use a more structured method for generating ideas (such as the work in pairs or a consensus-building activity).

It is important to remember that these “products” need not be elaborate or long. They are meant only to be the documentation of your group’s thinking, for the benefit of other practitioners who don’t have the opportunity to read about, talk about and think about how research concepts can be applied to practice. They can be generated through a simple brainstorm, or through taking notes of ideas during the discussion as they arise. The documented ideas grow naturally out of the Study Circle group’s discussions; they are not something that will require extra work for participants outside of the readings they will already be doing as part of the Study Circle.

Who should I contact for more information?

If you have questions about the outcome of the Study Circle, or just want to talk it over with someone from the PDRN, we’d be happy to discuss it with you beforehand. Please contact the NCSALL PDRN Coordinator in your region, or the national coordinator for PDRN. Names and addresses are listed below:

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How can I share the experience of running the Study Circle?

We'd love to hear how it went, so that we can improve this and other Study Circles we produce in the future. Also, it lets us know who is doing what around the country. Please consider sending us the feedback form (in Appendix E), along with any practical ideas, recommendations or other documentation from your Study Circle. Or, feel free to give us a call to let us know about your experience.

Introduction to the Study Circle Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education

This NCSALL Study Circle addresses the measurement of program performance in adult education programs. The primary readings from *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education* by Juliet Merrifield lay out key issues in performance accountability and present recommendations for policy and action. This topic is particularly relevant as the states and programs make plans and policy decisions regarding the new Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that will govern federal adult basic education spending after July 1, 1999. The WIA includes strong mandates for performance accountability that will impact all who are involved in adult basic education. This paper examines performance accountability and what kind of system would meet the needs of everyone involved in adult basic education.

In the first session, the Study Circle group will examine the concept of performance accountability in the context of their own adult basic education programs and look more closely at the meanings of accountability and performance accountability in the Workforce Investment Act.

The second session includes discussion of literacy performances in terms of New Literacy Studies and then reviews the capacity of adult basic education programs to measure their performance.

In the final session, the group will look at the recommendations in *Contested Ground* and consider the relevance of Merrifield's recommendations for their own work. The group will develop a final "product," perhaps a recommendation for their local or state system on accountability.

The activities suggested for each session include discussion of the readings and discussion of the program contexts of group members. The direction that the discussions go will vary with the concerns of each group. It is important that the facilitator be flexible and that the discussion meets the needs of all the group members. Some activities may not be relevant or may need to be modified. This guide should be used as a guide, not a rigid prescription. When this Study Circle was piloted, one group held four sessions; another group began the session by having people react to the readings as they introduced themselves. The Study Circle facilitator, with input from the group, may want to make modifications in time, activities, and even add content, while maintaining the focus on performance accountability in adult education.

Session Guide for Facilitating the Performance Accountability Study Circle

Day One

Objectives:

- Participants get to know one another and learn about how the Study Circle will run (including setting ground rules for participation in the Study Circle).
- Participants learn about their own and others' context (work situation) in relation to the topic.
- Participants discuss issues about the topic from the readings.

Time: 2.5-3 hours

Materials:

- Newsprint: Purpose of NCSALL Study Circles
- Newsprint: Performance Accountability Study Circle: Day One Agenda
- Handout #4: *Sample Ground Rules* by the Study Circle Resource Center (Appendix C)
- Reading #2: National Institute for Literacy Policy Update: *Workforce Investment Act Offers Opportunities for Adult and Family Literacy* (Appendix C)
- Handout #5: List of Readings to be read for Day Two and Day Three (Appendix C)

Steps:

1. **Introductions:** (10 minutes) Welcome participants to the first meeting of the Study Circle. Introduce yourself and state your role as facilitator of the Study Circle. Explain how you came to facilitate this Study Circle and who is sponsoring it. Ask participants to introduce themselves briefly (name, program, role) and to say whether they have ever attended a Study Circle in the past. Or, you can do a VERY brief icebreaker (no more than 5 minutes) in addition to the introductions.
2. **Agenda for the Study Circle and Day One:** (5 minutes) Say a few words about the purposes of the Study Circle, by posting the following newsprint:

Purpose of the NCSALL Study Circles:

1. to help practitioners read, discuss and use research to improve their practice;
2. to generate recommendations and practical suggestions for other practitioners about how to translate research into practice; and/or
3. to generate feedback and information about how research can be more helpful to those who work in adult literacy programs.

Mention briefly that NCSALL hopes that each Study Circle produces a “product”; for example, a list for other practitioners of recommendations for practice. In the final session (Day 3), the group can spend some time generating this “product”. Be sure that people understand that the product grows naturally out of the Study Circle group’s discussions and that it is not something that will require extra work for them outside of the readings they will already be doing as part of the Study Circle.

Post the following Day One agenda on newsprint:

Performance Accountability Study Circle: Day One

1. Introductions
2. Overview of Purpose and Agenda
3. Expectations and Group Norms for the Study Circle
4. Your Interest and Experience in the Topic
5. Discussing the first readings
6. Closure, Quick Evaluation, and Readings for Day Two

Describe each activity briefly. Ask if people have any questions about the agenda.

If you haven’t already, attend to the logistics of where the bathrooms are, when the session will end, when the break will be, etc.

3. **Expectations and Group Norms for the Study Circle:** (20 minutes) Direct people’s attention to the handouts they received before this first session on what a Study Circle is, etc. Ask people to respond to the following question:

➤ “*What do you hope to get out of this Study Circle?*”

Go around the circle and ask each person to make a short statement in response to this question; write their statement up on newsprint as they say it. (If someone begins to talk about their teaching situation, etc., point to the agenda and remind them that there will a chance to talk about that a little later in the meeting.) After everyone has made their statement, summarize what you hear and talk about how and where in the three-meeting Study Circle agenda their needs will be met.

This is a good time to be clear with participants about the things they might have stated they were expecting to learn that are NOT part of the Study Circle (the Study Circle is not a training that will provide them with handouts or demonstrations on teaching techniques, materials for teaching, etc.)

Reiterate that the Study Circle is for talking about three things:

1. Their context and experiences in relation to the topic.
2. Theories and concepts from the research or readings about the topic.
3. Their ideas about the implications of these theories and concepts for practice, policy and further research.

Ask if there are any questions about what a Study Circle is or isn't or about the design of this one.

Next, explain that one of the things that helps Study Circles to run smoothly is an agreement among participants about ground rules to follow during the meetings and discussions.

Hand out *Sample Ground Rules* (Handout #4), Appendix C. After giving people a few minutes to look it over, ask if there are any ground rules people would like to add to the list. Write these on newsprint as they are mentioned. At the end of the brainstorm, ask if everyone agrees with these ground rules (using the "I can't live with that one" criterion; i.e., you might not be crazy about one or more of these but you can "live with it" and agree to abide by it). Let participants know that you recognize it is your job, as facilitator, to remind them of these ground rules when and if you see them being "broken".

4. **Performance Accountability in Our Programs:** (50 minutes) Explain that, now that the logistics are covered, this first activity is designed to allow you to talk about your own work in relation to this topic.

Ask participants to think a moment, then individually and silently make a list of what they are accountable for in their work. Go around the group and ask each person to tell you two things on their list. Write each on a sheet of newsprint labeled ACCOUNTABLE FOR. After every person has spoken, go around again and ask for any items not already on the list and record those.

Now ask the group to think to whom are they accountable. Using the same process as above, list the various types of people or organizations named, e.g. students, program director, state ABE, etc. on another sheet of newsprint labeled ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM. Tell the group that these lists are a beginning picture of performance accountability in their programs.

Ask someone to read the quote from Brizius and Campbell on page 19 of *Contested Ground*. Note that in the previous activity you explored what you were accountable and to whom but not how you measured and reported outcomes.

Ask the group to think a moment about the outcomes they measure and report and how. For example, they might measure, using a standardized test, how learners' reading has changed or they might keep track of how many people got jobs. Remind them that outcomes are what comes out of the program, usually changes in learner(s) lives, not what goes in, such as instruction.

Using the same process as above, go around the group and ask each person to tell two outcomes they measure and how. List these on a sheet of newsprint labeled ACCOUNTABLE HOW; go around again and ask for any not yet reported and add these to the list. Explain that you have now added "how" to the picture of performance accountability in their programs. The next activity looks at why.

(SAVE THE FLIP CHARTS/NEWSPRINTS FROM THIS MEETING TO USE IN THE NEXT MEETINGS.)

BREAK: 15 minutes

5. **Discussing the purposes of performance accountability:** (30 minutes) Explain that in the next activity the group will begin to look at the purposes of performance accountability in theory and practice as investigated by Merrifield. Refer the group to the list of purposes for performance accountability on page 21. Note that these were discussed by the various people Merrifield interviewed. Ask the group to re-read the list and then to discuss using the following questions to guide the discussion:

- *Which of these purposes for performance accountability do you believe apply in your programs?*
- *Which do you think should apply?*
- *What kinds of changes would need to be made to address the purposes you think most important?*
- *In what ways are your programs "learning organizations", as described on page 23?*

6. **Adding to the Context:** (30 minutes) Explain that in the next activity, you are going to update Chapter 1 with a summary of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, the new legislative mandate mentioned on page 8.

Give each person a copy of the article *Workforce Investment Act Offers Opportunities for Adult and Family Literacy* (Reading #2, Appendix C). Ask them to take a few moments to read the parts most relevant to the discussion: Goals (p. 1) and "New Accountability System" (p. 3). YOU MAY WANT TO POINT OUT THAT THE HANDOUT OUTLINES THE 1998 LAW AND THEY MAY WANT TO READ THE ENTIRE HANDOUT LATER, BUT THAT THESE ARE THE SECTIONS YOU ARE FOCUSING ON IN THE STUDY CIRCLE.

Then discuss these sections and the changes Merrifield described in Chapter 1, (summarized on page 5), using the following questions and any questions of your own:

- *What societal changes (pp. 5-7) does the new law seem to address?*
- *What concept of literacy (pp. 10-12) does the new law seem to use?*
- *Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?*
- *What purposes of education (pp. 12-13) does this law seem to address?*
- *Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?*

7. **Closure, Evaluation, and Readings for Day Two and Day Three:** (10 minutes)

Explain to participants that this is all the time we have left for this first day's meeting. Tell them that you want to get feedback from them about how this first session was designed, so that you can give that feedback to NCSALL for improving the Study Circle design. Post a newsprint that looks like this:

<u>Good</u>	<u>How to Improve</u>

Ask participants first to tell you what was useful and/or helpful to them about the design of this first session of the Study Circle, and write their comments up on the newsprint under the "Good" side of the newsprint. Then, ask them to make suggestion or recommendations for how to improve this session (rather than say what was "bad" or what they didn't like). Write their comments up, without response from you, under the "how to improve" side of the newsprint. If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask them if they can rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion up.

It is VERY important not to defend or justify in any response anything you have done in the Study Circle or anything about the design, as this will cut off all further suggestions. If anyone makes an off-the-wall suggestion or something you don't agree with, just nod your head, or, if you feel some response is needed, rephrase their concern: "So you feel that what we should do instead of the small group discussion is to _____, right?"

(Save this newsprint and copy their comments into the end-of-Study Circle report you send to NCSALL.)

Finally, **hand out the reading assignment for the remainder of the Study Circle.** Hand out to them Handout #5, Appendix C: *List of Readings to be Read for Day Two and Day Three of the Study Circle*. To the best of your ability, be sure that what they are required to read before the next meeting is clear to them.

Repeat the date time and place for the next meeting. If applicable, explain to them the process you will use for canceling and rescheduling the next meeting in the event of bad weather. Be sure that you have everyone's home and/or work phone numbers so that you can reach them in case of cancellation.

Day Two

Objectives:

- Participants will discuss issues related to literacy performances, capacity in literacy programs, and measurement in programs.

Time: 2.5-3 hours

Materials:

- Newsprint and pens
- Newsprint: Problems with performance measurement
- Newsprint: How/What: Measuring your own program
- Newsprint: Feedback

Steps:

1. **Welcome and agenda review** (10 minutes): Welcome the group back and review the agenda for the session: a discussion of understandings of literacy performance, a discussion of capacity in literacy programs, and another look at measurement in your programs. Briefly outline the activities. Ask if anyone has any additional thoughts or comments from the first meeting.
2. **Literacy performance** (40 minutes): For a discussion about definitions of literacy performances (pages 26 -35), generate a discussion using the "live likert scale" format.

Put up around the room three signs: on the right wall, put up a sign that, in big letters, says AGREE. On the back wall, put up a sign that says NOT SURE. On the left wall, put up a sign that says DISAGREE. Ask everyone to stand up, moving the chairs (if necessary) so that people will be able to move around the room without too many obstructions.

Explain to the group that this next activity is purely for promoting discussion, and there are no right or wrong answers. You will read a statement aloud, twice; they will listen to the statement and then move to the area of the room near the sign that corresponds to how they feel about the statement: they AGREE, they DISAGREE, or they're NOT SURE.

Emphasize that the statements have deliberately been written ambiguously, not to drive them crazy, but to generate discussion (in other words, if the statements were very "black" or "white", everyone would easily agree or disagree and there would be no discussion, so the statement have been written so that they provoke thoughts or so that people may agree with one part but not another).

Explain that after everyone has moved to stand near a sign, you will ask one or two people standing near AGREE to explain why they moved there (why they agreed with

the statement). If fellow participants, listening to the explanation, are moved to change their mind, they may move to stand near another sign reflecting their new opinions. Continue around the room, asking 1-2 people standing under each sign why they are standing there. Feel free to let participants "dialogue" with each other from different sides of the room; in other words, they are not trying to convince you but each other. After the discussion continues for approximately 10 minutes, draw it to a close and read another statement. Continue until all four statements have been discussed (or until 40 minutes has passed, whichever comes first; if a discussion around one statement is particularly rich, you may want to let it go on and skip one of the statements; similarly, if there is no good discussion on one of the statements, just move on to the next).

The statements for discussion with the "live likert scale" activity are:

- *Literacy performance is best described as a set of skills that can be used in many settings.*
- *Competency-based measurements of literacy cannot work because they are always culturally biased.*
- *Literacy is something that happens in social interactions, not something we do with our heads.* (Gee et al., 1996, quoted on page 31)
- *Good literacy instruction has to be connected to learner's everyday lives.*

3. **Discussing your capacity to count and perform:** (45 minutes) In this activity, the group examines their own programs with regard to the capacity to perform their work and the capacity of programs to measure performance. Guide the discussion using the following questions and any others you choose.

- *Chapter 3 in Contested Ground addresses the capacity of the broad field of adult basic education to be accountable. Merrifield says, "Adult basic education is struggling to create a national accountability system without having created a national service delivery system" (p. 36). Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?*
- *On page 38 are a list of findings from various research reports. Read them one by one (or ask a group member to read), asking after each one if they think the findings are valid and why or why not.*

BREAK (15 minutes)

4. **Measuring performance:** (50 minutes) Explain that in this activity the group will look again at what they measure in their programs and at how they might change that. Post the newsprint/flip-chart paper from Day 1. Remind them that these show what they are accountable for, to whom, and how they report outcomes. Ask them if there is anything they would like to add to the lists. Ask them what else they measure, particularly if there are any non-outcome data (such as attendance) that they keep and report. List this on a separate flip-chart page.

Next, outline the problems with performance measurement discussed on pages 46-47 (YOU MAY WANT TO WRITE THESE ON A FLIP CHART AHEAD OF TIME).

- What is counted usually becomes what counts, focusing effort and instruction on certain areas because they are tested and reported
- Measures sort people into categories that may not match their needs or abilities
- Measuring the wrong thing - what is measured does not give good information about progress toward learner or program goals
- Distortion effects – cramming and teaching to the test
- Gaming the numbers - being creative when you don't have actual data that you want.

Ask the group to if any of these are problems in adult basic education programs with which they are familiar. You may not want to ask people to talk about their own programs directly. If they voluntarily talk about their own programs this is fine, but you should remind people of the guidelines to keep the details of the conversation within the group (i.e., information about specific programs mentioned shouldn't be shared outside the group).

Next, ask the group to think about their own programs and if there are things that they wish they could better measure. Divide a flip-chart/newsprint page into two columns labeled WHAT and HOW. Ask the group for things they wish were measured and list under WHAT. Then go back down the list and ask for ideas about HOW these might be measured. An example under WHAT might be improved self-esteem; the HOW might be a student journal, or self-report, or a teacher check-list of certain behaviors.

<u>WHAT</u>	<u>HOW</u>
Improved self-esteem	Student journal, self report, checklist

Finish the discussion of measuring performance by asking for any insights or new ideas generated by the discussion.

4. **Closure, Evaluation, and Readings for Day Three** (10 minutes): Tell the group that you again want to get feedback from them about how this session was designed, so that you can give that feedback to your fellow Practitioner Leaders and to NCSALL for improving the Study Circle design. Post a newsprint that looks like this:

<u>Good</u>	<u>How to Improve</u>

Ask participants first to tell you what was useful and/or helpful to them about the design of this first session of the Study Circle, and write their comments up on the newsprint under the "Good" side of the newsprint. Then, ask them to make suggestion or recommendations for how to improve this session (rather than say what was "bad" or what they didn't like). Write their comments up, without response from you, under the "how to improve" side of the newsprint.

(Save this newsprint and copy their comments into the end-of-Study Circle report you send to NCSALL.)

Finally, remind people to **read Chapter 4 of Contested Ground, pages 56 -78**, for the final meeting, and restate the date, time and place for the next meeting.

Day Three

Objectives:

- Participants will discuss Merrifield's conclusions and recommendations.
- Participants will develop a product or action plan based on their work in the Study Circle.

Time: 3 hours

Materials:

- Newsprint, pens, tape

Steps:

1. **Welcome and agenda review** (10 minutes): Welcome the group back and review the agenda for the session: a discussion of Merrifield's conclusions and recommendations and development of a Study Circle product.
2. **What is success?** (40 minutes): Explain that this activity involves a written reflection on the meaning of success. Ask each person to write for three minutes on what success in the context of adult literacy looks like. The writing can be a list, notes, a paragraph, however they want to reflect on the meaning of success. Let them know before they begin that they will be reading whatever they write. Give people three minutes to write.

Then, go around the group ask each to read aloud what they have written. They should read one after another, without pause or comment by others. Before they begin reading, ask everyone to listen to hear the meaning of success for this group.

After all have read, ask for any thoughts or insights. Then, lead a discussion using the following questions:

- Is your picture of successful literacy performance one of “multiliteracies”, as discussed on page 57- 58?
 - What are the implications for performance accountability if a program does use the concept of multiliteracies in defining success?
 - Considering your definition of success (and this may be different from person to person), what would your program need to build its capacity for success?
3. **Is your performance accountability system SMART?** (30 minutes): Post all the flip-chart pages from the previous sessions that describe the performance accountability systems in the programs represented by the group (ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WHAT;

TO WHOM; HOW; WHAT/HOW; and the list of other items measured). This is an aggregate picture of the accountability system they are using.

Ask the group to take a few moments to review the SMART checklist on page 67-68. Then, ask them to evaluate and discuss their system using the SMART list. Go through the list item by item.

4. **Next steps** (45 minutes): Ask the group to look at the summary of next steps recommended by Merrifield on page 77. Ask them if they understand what is meant by each of the four recommendations. (The four recommendations are summarized in the Executive Summary and it might be helpful to refer to these pages).

Then ask them to break into pairs (with you participating if needed to make a pair). Ask each pair to take twenty minutes and add their own, more specific next steps for each recommendation to those suggested on page 77. These should be steps they could implement in their program or class. So for example, to reach agreement on performances in their program, next steps might include student activities to clarify goals or a program-wide planning process. Ask the pairs to record the steps, by recommendation, on a sheet of newsprint.

After 20 minutes, bring the group back together and have brief reports from each pair.

5. **A product from the Study Circle** (30 minutes): Remind participants that one of the objectives of the Study Circle is to create something for fellow practitioners about ways in which the research could be translated into practice, OR some feedback for researchers. Explain the importance of what this Study Circle can contribute to other practitioners who want practical suggestions about performance accountability but who don't have the benefit of having participated in this Study Circle.

You may want to ask the group for suggestions for a product, reach consensus and develop one of the products they have suggested or you may want to use the following activity to develop a product.

IF the group opts to provide some feedback to researchers (suggestions for further research, comments or critiques about this paper, etc.), use a simple brainstorm process to generate their issues and points.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY (30 minutes): Combined suggestions for Next Steps. Referring to the lists of next steps they have generated in pairs, suggest combining these recommendations into two sets of next steps or activities: One set would be steps or activities that could be implemented at the program level (e.g., discuss program-wide assessment in a staff meeting), and another set would be steps or activities that could be implemented at the class level (e.g., trying out student journals). These, then, could be a "product": a set of suggested activities teachers and programs could try around performance accountability. The whole group could add other activities to the ones already listed.

Taking two fresh sheets of newsprint, construct the two lists of steps, by asking the group to assign the recommended next steps from their pairs' lists to either the program or class list. You could put an asterisk in front of those steps that were listed on more than one pairs' list (to show consensus across the group). Ask if there are others to add to either list.

6. **Final evaluation** (10 minutes): Go around the room and ask each person to comment on the most useful idea or concept they walk away with from this Study Circle. After going around once, go back around and ask if anyone has suggestions for improving the Study Circle. These suggestions may be related to the **PROCESS** of the Study Circle (the activities, the way readings were organized, etc.) or the **CONTENT** of the Study Circle (the specific readings chosen, the clarity or richness of the readings or handouts, the focus of the discussions, etc.) Take notes as people talk so that you can include them in your report back to NCSALL about the Study Circle. Feel free to add your own suggestions, if you have any.

OR, you could pass out post-it notes and ask people to write down their ideas, comments or suggestions, one to a post-it, and then stick them up on a blank sheet of newsprint, giving people time at the end to come up and read everyone's comments.

Thank them all for coming. You may want to hand out subscription forms for *Focus on Basics*, a copy of the NCSALL Publications List and Order Form, and any copies of *NCSALL Research Briefs* or other NCSALL-related handouts that you think they might be interested in