

NCSALL Study Circle Guide:

Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts

NOVEMBER 2003



National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is a collaborative effort between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and World Education. The University of Tennessee, Portland State University, and Rutgers University are NCSALL's partners. NCSALL is funded by the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, Award Number R309B60002, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

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 Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research (CPPR) initiative. The Guide is part of NCSALL's effort to help connect research and practice in the field of adult basic education and adult literacy. We hope that these Study Circle Guides will be a tool that staff developers and practitioners can use to organize and conduct Study Circles that help practitioners read, discuss, and use research to improve their practice.

The Guides are intended for use by staff developers and practitioners who want to facilitate Study Circles on the topics that NCSALL researches.

The Guides are divided into the following parts:

1. Goal of NCSALL Study Circles
2. Preparing to Facilitate This Study Circle
3. Introduction to the Study Circle
4. Study Circle Outline
5. Facilitator's Schedule/To Do Form: What To Have Ready
6. Session Guide for Facilitating the Study Circle
7. Study Circle Readings and Handouts
8. Study Circle Resource Center Materials
9. 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. For more information about NCSALL Study Circle Guides or the NCSALL, contact:

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Information About NCSALL

The Mission of NCSALL. NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

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

NCSALL's Research Projects. The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that can be used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative. NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy*, a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports and Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. NCSALL also sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

For more information on NCSALL activities and publications, visit our Web site at:

<http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu>

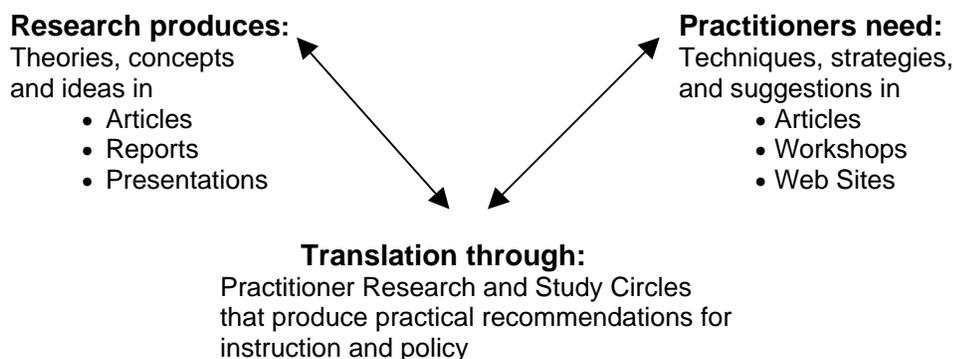
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Goal of NCSALL Study Circles

The goal of NCSALL is to improve the quality of practice in adult 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 access, understand, judge, and use research in their work. Therefore, the goal of the NCSALL Study Circles is to help adult education practitioners, in a small group setting, learn about research findings, theories, and concepts from NCSALL’s research and discuss how these can be applied to practice and policy in adult education.

When we talk to practitioners in the field of adult literacy about research, they ask for techniques, strategies, and practical suggestions that they can use immediately. Yet, researchers often produce reports, articles, and other documents that provide primarily theories, concepts, ideas, and sometimes implications for practice. NCSALL feels that there should 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 are professional development 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:



We at NCSALL believe that we need 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 for practitioners to really read, think about, and discuss with each other what research findings mean and whether they are useful or applicable to adult education instructional settings and programs.

We welcome your feedback about how this NCSALL Study Circle Guide worked and how it could be improved. Contact us (phone, e-mail, letter) and tell us how it went and what you’d do differently next time. Thanks for being part of the process of connecting practice and research.

Preparing to Facilitate This Study Circle

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; however, some of the readings have acronyms that may need to be reviewed with participants.

The Study Circles are designed for approximately eight participants. We don't recommend running a Study Circle with fewer than five 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 each. 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 and finding and selecting their own readings on the topic, they can set that up during the last session. We have included suggestions for an optional fourth 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. It also includes a registration form for practitioners to mail back to you.

You are welcome to use the flyer to send out 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, 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 set the second and third dates with participants during the first meeting of the Study Circle.

In general, we recommend the first option since it is sometimes difficult 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.

It is best to have no more than two weeks between sessions to maintain continuity.

What Do I Need to Do to Get Ready for the First Session?

When you feel that you have solid commitments from the number of participants you are seeking, contact them to confirm their participation in the Study Circle. **At this time, reconfirm the times, dates, and location of the Study Circle with the participants.**

As mentioned above, the Study Circles have been designed for a group of practitioners to meet over three sessions, with each session being three hours long. To prepare for the first session, we suggest that a small number of very short readings and a brief cover letter with information about the Study Circle be sent to practitioners to read over before the first meeting.

After confirming their participation, **send each participant the Pre-Meeting Packet of materials to read before the first meeting.** You will find these in Appendix B: "Pre-Meeting Packet of Readings and Handouts. **Participants 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 Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle should include the items listed below. **In the cover letter, you will need to add** the place, date, and time of the first meeting and your phone number and email address and sign it before you make copies. The Pre-Meeting Packet includes:

1. Cover letter: “Information about the Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle”
2. “What Is a Study Circle?” (Handout A)
3. “What Study Circles Are, and Are Not: A Comparison” (Handout B)
4. “The Role of the Participant” (Handout C)
5. “Schedule/To Do Form” (Handout D)
6. “Taking Literacy Skills Home” (Reading #1)
7. Folder for holding materials

Be sure that you arrive early for each session in order to set up the chairs in a circle; arrange your newsprint; and organize handouts, pens, tapes, etc. It’s nice to have some sort of refreshment, such as juice, coffee, or water. Check out where the restrooms are so you can tell participants where they are located, and make sure the heating or cooling in the room is appropriate.

You may also want to have (or start during the meeting) a list of participants and their phone numbers or e-mail addresses so participants can contact one another during the course of the Study Circle. Always bring two or three extra copies of the readings and handouts.

What Kind of Support Can I Expect?

For advice on facilitating a Study Circle, please review the information on facilitation included in Appendix E (Resources for the Facilitator). These readings are from the Study Circle Resource Center in Pomfret, Connecticut, an expert resource in conducting Study Circles. We thank them for their guidance in facilitating Study Circles.

If you want to talk over the Study Circle beforehand with someone from NCSALL, we’d be happy to discuss it with you. We can be reached at:

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What if I Want to Change the Activities in the Guide?

Feel free. These Guides are intended to help first-time Facilitators who want a lot of guidance. They are not intended to be a script that must be followed. If you have a different idea for how to do an activity, you should use it. To help you, we have offered alternate ideas for several of the activities.

What Should Be the Outcomes of the Study Circle?

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 group is able to generate practical ideas or recommendations for teaching and program practice that can be disseminated to other practitioners and researchers. By sharing the practical ideas or recommendations that come from discussions about how research theories, concepts, and ideas can be used in instructional settings and programs, Study Circle participants play a role in the larger process of “translating” research into practice.

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 F), 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: Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts

This NCSALL Study Circle is based on research conducted by a team led by Victoria Purcell-Gates. Their research examines the relationships between two dimensions of literacy instruction (the degree of authenticity of activities and texts and the degree of student/teacher collaboration) and changes in the literacy practices of students outside the classroom. Readings from the *Focus on Basics* article “Taking Literacy Skills Home,” from the NCSALL research report *Affecting Change in Literacy Practices of Adult Learners: Impact of Two Dimensions of Instruction*, and from NCSALL Teaching and Training materials *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom* explain the theory on which the research was based, the methodology of the study, and how the results can be used to improve practice in adult education classrooms.

In Session One, the Study Circle group will examine teaching and learning in an authentic context and how the research was conducted.

Session Two includes discussion of the theory of contextualized instruction and how it looks in practice. The group will also review other research that supports this research.

In the final session, Session Three, the group will examine ways that they might implement contextualized teaching in their classes, including ways to better know students’ contexts. Participants will discuss the challenges of using authentic instruction and as well as supports to integrating authentic activities and materials into their classes. In the last part of Session Three, participants will plan actions they will take to make their instruction more contextualized.

Each session includes discussion of the readings and how ideas generated from the readings can be applied to the program contexts of group members. The direction of the discussions will vary with the concerns of each group. It is important that discussions and activities meet the needs of all the group members. The Facilitator needs to be flexible and may need to modify some activities to fit the needs and learning styles of Study Circle participants. This Study Circle Guide should be used as a guide, not a rigid script.

Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle: Outline

Session One

- OBJECTIVES:
- Participants will get to know one another and learn how the Study Circle will be run, including setting ground rules for participation.
 - Participants will develop a basic understanding of instruction in an authentic context and the NCSALL study on the effects of authentic context on student literacy practices.
 - Participants will learn about their own and others' teaching contexts.
-

TIME: 3 hours

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 10 minutes | 1. Welcome and Introductions |
| 10 minutes | 2. Purpose and Overview of the Study Circle, Session One Objectives, and Agenda |
| 20 minutes | 3. Participant Expectations and Group Norms |
| 35 minutes | 4. Your Teaching Context |
| 15 minutes | BREAK |
| 25 minutes | 5. Overview of This Research |
| 25 minutes | 6. The Purposes of the Research |
| 30 minutes | 7. Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts |
| 10 minutes | 8. Evaluation, Readings for Session Two, and Closure |

Session Two

- OBJECTIVES:
- Participants will gain a greater understanding of how authentic contexts can frame instruction.
 - Participants will gain a greater understanding of the theory on which authentic instruction is based.
 - Participants will consider additional research on using authentic materials for instruction.
-

TIME: 3 hours

- 10 minutes* 1. Welcome, Session Two Objectives, and Agenda
- 40 minutes* 2. Theme-Based Authentic Instruction
- 20 minutes* 3. Real-Life? Authentic? Contextualized?
- 15 minutes* BREAK
- 35 minutes* 4. Other Research on Contextualized Instruction
- 45 minutes* 5. Implications for Your Own Work
- 15 minutes* 6. Evaluation, Readings for Session Three, and Closure

Session Three

- OBJECTIVES:
- Participants will explore ways to learn about students' contexts.
 - Participants will strategize about how to decrease barriers and increase supports for using authentic contexts and materials in teaching.
 - Participants will plan the next steps they want to take for using authentic instruction their programs.
 - Participants will make a plan for the group's next steps.

TIME: 3 hours

- 10 minutes* 1. Welcome, Session Three Objectives, and Agenda
- 30 minutes* 2. Learning About Students' Contexts
- 35 minutes* 3. Implementing Authentic Teaching and Learning in Your Contexts: Constraints and Supports
- 15 minutes* BREAK
- 45 minutes* 4. Action Planning
- 30 minutes* 5. A Plan for Our Group
- 15 minutes* 6. Final Evaluation

Facilitator's Schedule/To Do Form: What To Have Ready (continued)

Session	Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time)	Handouts (One copy for each participant)	Readings (One copy for each participant)	Materials
Session Two	Objectives for Session Two (p. 28) Session Two Agenda (p. 29) Comparing Two Studies (p. 30)	Handout G: "Real-Life? Authentic? Contextualized?" Handout H: "What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students" Handout I: "Planning Form" (Also, make a few extra copies of Handouts E and F for participants who forget to bring theirs. These handouts are in Appendix C.)	Reading #3: <i>Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom</i> : Chapter 2, "Getting To Know Your Students and Their Contexts" (entire chapter) (Have a few extra copies of <i>Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom</i> for participants who forget to bring theirs.)	Blank newsprint sheets Newsprint easel Markers, pens, tape
Session Three	Objectives for Session Three (p. 35) Session Three Agenda (p. 35) Implementing Authentic Instruction: Constraints and Supports (p. 37) Next Steps (p. 38) Ideas for Our Group's Next Steps (p. 39)	There are no new handouts to prepare for this session. (Make a few extra copies of Handouts G-I for participants who forget to bring theirs. These handouts are in Appendix D.)	There are no new readings to prepare for this session. (Have a few extra copies of <i>Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom</i> for participants who forget to bring theirs.)	4" x 6" sticky note pads (or blank strips of paper) Blank newsprint sheets Newsprint easel Markers, pens, tape

Session Guide for Facilitating the Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle

Session One – Preparation



Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time)

- Purpose of the NCSALL Study Circles (p. 16)
- Overview of Study Circle (p. 16)
- Objectives for Session One (p. 17)
- Session One Agenda (p. 17)
- What I Hope To Get Out of the Study Circle (p. 18)
- Literacy Practice of Adult Learners* (p. 21)
- Literacy Practice of Adult Learners: Questions About the Research* (p. 22)
- Using Authentic Materials: Discussion Questions (p. 24)
- Useful – How To Improve (p. 25)



Handouts (Make copies for each participant. These handouts are in Appendix C.)

- Handout E: “Overview of Study Circle”
- Handout F: “Sample Ground Rules”

(Also, make a few extra copies of Handouts A-D for participants who forget to bring theirs. These handouts are in Appendix B.)



Readings (Make one copy of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom* for each participant. This is available free for downloading from the NCSALL Web site (<http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu>) under “Teaching Materials.”)

- Reading #2: *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom*: Chapter 3, “Using Authentic Materials and Activities in the Classroom (entire chapter) and Chapter 4, “Authentic Thematic Activities for the Classroom” (pp. 67-69 and pp. 78-87)

Note to facilitator: bound copies of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom* can be ordered in bulk from NCSALL at \$5 per copy.

(Also, make a few extra copies of Reading #1 for participants who forget to bring theirs. This reading is in Appendix B.)

Materials

- Three signs: AGREE, DISAGREE, NOT SURE
- Blank newsprint sheets
- Newsprint easel
- Markers, pens, tape

Session One – Process

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Participants will get to know one another and learn how the Study Circle will be run, including setting ground rules for participation.
 - Participants will develop a basic understanding of instruction in an authentic context and the NCSALL study on the effects of authentic context on student literacy practices.
 - Participants will learn about their own and others' teaching contexts.

TIME: 3 hours

STEPS:

1. Welcome and 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 five minutes) in addition to the introductions.
- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other “housekeeping” information.

Another Idea

Ask participants: “What was an extra arrangement you had to make to free up time to be here today?”

2. Purpose and Overview of the Study Circle, Session One Objectives, and Agenda (10 minutes)

- **Post the “Purpose of the NCSALL Study Circles” newsprint and go over the purpose with participants.**

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.
3. To generate feedback and information for researchers about how research can be more helpful to those who work in adult literacy programs.

-  **Distribute Handout E: “Overview of Study Circle.”** Give participants a minute to read the handout, then provide a brief overview of the three sessions. You may want to use this “Overview of Study Circle” newsprint.

Overview of Study Circle

Session 1 – Introduce study circles and examine teaching and learning in authentic contexts and how the research was conducted.

Session 2 – Discuss the theory of contextualized instruction and how it looks in practice. Also review other research that supports this research.

Session 3 – Examine ways to implement contextualized teaching in classes. Discuss ways to better know students’ contexts. Discuss challenges and supports for integrating authentic instruction into classes. Plan next steps to take to make instruction more contextualized.

Note to Facilitator

See “Introduction to the Study Circle: Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts,” p. 7 of this Study Circle Guide.

- **Post the “Objectives for Session One” newsprint and go over the objectives briefly with the group.**

Objectives for Session One

Participants will:

- Get to know one another and learn how the Study Circle will be run, including setting ground rules for participation.
- Develop a basic understanding of instruction in an authentic context and the NCSALL study on the effects of authentic context on student literacy practices.
- Learn about their own and others' teaching contexts.

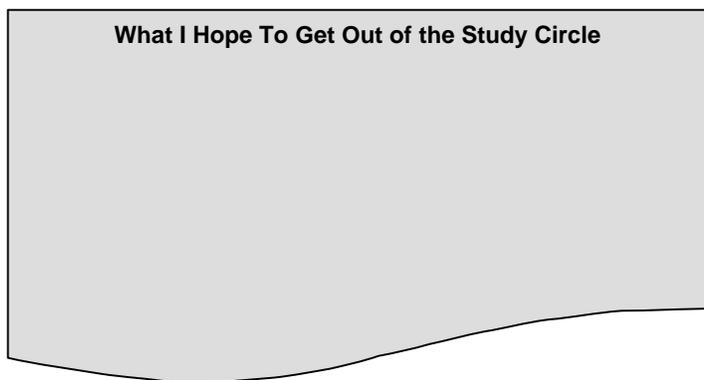
- **Post the “Session One Agenda” newsprint and describe each activity briefly. Ask if people have any questions about the agenda.**

Session One Agenda

- Introductions (Done!)
- Purpose and Overview of Study Circle (Done!)
- Objectives for Session One (Done!)
- Overview of Agenda (Doing)
- Participant Expectations and Group Norms
- Your Teaching Context
- BREAK
- Overview of the Research
- Purpose of the Research
- Teaching and Learning in an Authentic Context
- Evaluation, Readings for Session Two, and Closure

3. Participant Expectations and Group Norms (20 minutes)

-  **Direct people’s attention to Handout A: “What Is a Study Circle” and Handout B: “What Study Circles Are, and Are Not: A Comparison”** which were included in their Pre-Meeting Packet.
- **Post the “What I Hope To Get Out of the Study Circle” newsprint.**



Go around the circle and ask each person to make a short statement in response to this question. Write their statements on the newsprint as they say them. If someone begins to talk about a topic not directly related to this question (for example, his or her teaching situation), point to the “Session One Agenda” newsprint and remind them that there will be a chance to talk about that a little later in the meeting.

- **After everyone has made a statement, summarize what you heard** and talk about how and where in the three-session Study Circle their needs will be met.

Also, be clear with participants about the things they may have stated they were expecting to learn which are **NOT** part of the Study Circle. For example, the Study Circle is not a training that will provide them with handouts or demonstrations on teaching techniques or materials for teaching.

Another Idea

Ask participants to choose another person to talk with about the question.

After three or four minutes, reconvene the group and ask each pair to briefly state what they hope to get out of the Study Circle. Write their statements on newsprint.

- **Reiterate that the Study Circle is for talking about three things:**
 - theories and concepts from the research or readings about the topic
 - their context and experiences in relation to the topic
 - their ideas about the implications of these theories and concepts for their own and other practitioners' 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 help Study Circles to run smoothly** is an agreement among participants about ground rules to follow during the meetings and discussions.
-  **Distribute Handout F: "Sample Ground Rules."** After giving participants a few minutes to look it over, ask if there are any ground rules they would like to add to or delete from the list. Write these on newsprint as they are mentioned.
- **Ask if everyone agrees with these ground rules.** Use the "I can 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. The discussion should be only around those ground rules that participants find objectionable and "can't live by." Let participants know that it is your job, as Facilitator, to remind them of these ground rules if you see them being broken.

Another Idea

Invite participants to set the ground rules to be followed for the Study Circle. Write each ground rule on newsprint as participants say it.

After five minutes or so, distribute Handout F: "Sample Ground Rules" and ask participants if there are any ground rules on this handout that they would like to add to their list. Add these to the newsprint.

4. Your Teaching Context

(35 minutes)

- **Tell the group that the next activity will give them the opportunity to consider their own teaching context** and to share that context with the group.

Ask people to think of a lesson that they have taught recently.

They should think of all the factors that affected that lesson – environment, students, program factors, etc. Ask them to make a written list of everything that influenced how the lesson "went." These factors make up the context of their class that day. Tell them they will have 10 minutes to work individually on their lists.

Note to Facilitator

The list might include place, number of students, type of program, level of students, time and duration of class, type of instruction, materials, planning time, etc.

After 10 minutes, ask participants to share their lists with another person, working in pairs. Allow about five minutes for this sharing.

- **Explain that now that they have learned a little more about each others' teaching contexts, the group will think about what is important in a teaching context.** Ask the group what factors about a class or other teaching context (for example, a one-on-one tutoring situation) are important to the teaching and learning that occur in that context. Write these factors on a newsprint list.

Ask participants to talk about how these factors affect their own teaching context. They should refer to the lists they generated as they briefly describe their own teaching context in relation to the factors on the newsprint list. Ask each person to talk for no more than three minutes.

Note to Facilitator

You may want to use an egg timer to time each person's comments.

Note to Facilitator

To ensure you are able to start up again in 15 minutes, suggest that they return in ten minutes to be ready to go.

BREAK (15 minutes)

5. Overview of This Research

(25 minutes)

- **Explain** to participants that this next activity is designed to give them an overview of the research.
-  **Introduce the research study, *Literacy Practice of Adult Learners*,** by referring to Reading #1: "Taking Literacy Skills Home" that was distributed in the Pre-Meeting Packet. Ask how many in the group had a chance to read the article. If most have not read it, give the group about 10 minutes to read the article through the first two paragraphs in the "Change" section.

- **Post the “*Literacy Practice of Adult Learners*” newsprint.** If most people have not read the article, use the questions on this newsprint as prediction questions – a pre-reading activity.

Literacy Practice of Adult Learners
by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson, & Marta Soler

What did this study look at?

Who were the participants?

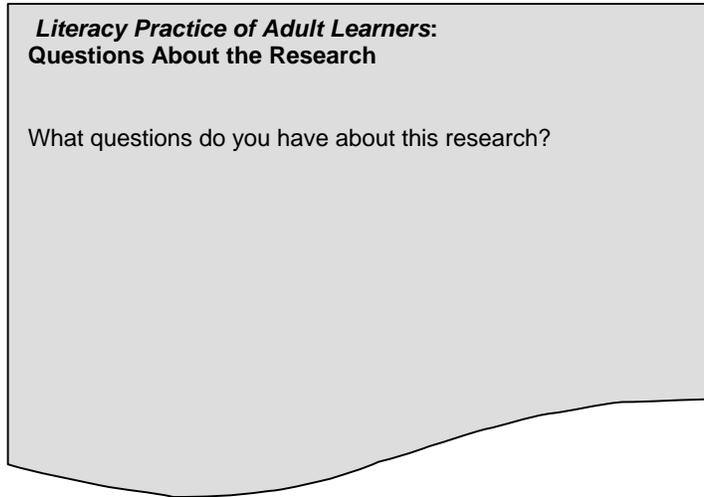
What two dimensions of literacy instruction did the study examine?

What were the results?

Divide the group into four pairs or small groups. Ask each pair or group to use Reading #1: “Taking Literacy Skills Home” to answer the questions on this newsprint and be ready to report their answers to the group.

- After 10 minutes, **ask one pair or group to volunteer** to answer the first question. Ask for any additions from the other groups and summarize the answers on the newsprint. Go to the next pair and question and repeat the process until the first four questions are answered.

- Post the “*Literacy Practice of Adult Learners: Questions About the Research*” newsprint.



Ask each pair or group if they have questions about how the research was conducted. List these questions on the newsprint. Suggest that, as they read more about this study, they may discover the answers.

They may also want to read the **NCSALL Report # 17, *Affecting Change in Literacy Practices of Adult Learners*** for more detail on how the research was conducted. Tell participants that this report is available free for downloading from NCSALL's Web site, under Publications, Reports at:

<http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/report17.pdf>

6. The Purposes of the Research

(25 minutes)

- Use the “**live Likert scale**” format for a discussion of the reasons for looking at changes in literacy practices. Tell participants that this activity will give them an opportunity to discuss the ideas that underpin the purposes of this research. Put up around the room three signs in large letters as follows:
 - on the right wall: AGREE
 - on the back wall: NOT SURE
 - on the left wall: DISAGREE

Note to Facilitator

You may want to put up these signs before the session begins.

- **Ask everyone to stand up**, moving desks or chairs if necessary so that people can move easily around the room. Explain 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 sign that corresponds to how they feel about the statement: AGREE, DISAGREE, or NOT SURE. Emphasize that the statements have been deliberately written to generate discussion.
- **After everyone is standing near a sign, ask one or two people near the AGREE sign to explain why they agree with the statement.** Tell participants that, if they change their mind after listening to the explanations, they may move to another sign that reflects their new opinion. Continue around the room to the NOT SURE and DISAGREE signs, asking one or two people standing near each sign to say why they are standing there. There will not be time for all participants to state their opinion. Feel free to let participants “dialogue” with each other from different sides of the room.
- **Draw the discussion of a statement to a close** after approximately ten minutes and read another statement. Continue until all three statements have been discussed or until 30 minutes has passed, whichever comes first. If the discussion around one statement is particularly rich, you may want to let it go on and skip one of the other statements. Similarly, if there is little discussion about a statement, just move on to the next.

The three statements for discussion with the “live Likert Scale” activity are:

Statement 1

The most important outcome of adult literacy instruction is the actual application of newly learned literacy skills.

Statement 2

Children’s understanding that print is meaningful and functional in people’s lives predicts their success at learning to read and write in school.

Statement 3

Out-of-school contexts are the best places to practice literacy skills.

Note to Facilitator

You should not comment on these explanations except to ask clarifying questions if needed.

Note to Facilitator

The purpose of this dialogue among participants is to convince each other, not you.

Another idea

If the discussion is slow, consider asking the following questions:

Statement 1

- What are other possible effects of increased literacy practices?

Statement 2

- How does having adults read and write more affect the children in their home?

Statement 3

- How are other skills (e.g. driving, etc.) practiced in class? Out of class?

7. Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts (30 minutes)

-  **Direct people’s attention to the two “sidebars” in Reading #1: “Taking Literacy Skills Home”** (Karen and Peter and Christine) on using authentic materials. Tell them this next activity will help clarify what we mean by “teaching and learning in authentic contexts,” an approach which is also called “contextualized instruction.”
- **Post the “Using Authentic Materials: Discussion Questions” newsprint.**

Using Authentic Materials: Discussion Questions

- How were the teaching and learning in this class authentic? Consider the materials, the activities, and whose purposes were addressed.
- What “basic skills” were being learned or practiced in this class? How were they being learned or practiced?

Divide the participants into two groups. Ask one group to use Karen’s story to answer these discussion questions. Ask the other to use Peter and Christine’s story to answer the questions.

Give each group one or two sheets of newsprint and a set of markers. Allow 15 minutes for the groups to:

- 1) Review the reading.
- 2) Write their answers to the questions on newsprint.

- **After 15 minutes, have the groups post their newsprint sheets.** Then allow five minutes for a silent gallery reading of these analyses.
- **Reconvene the group** and ask participants for their comments on how these teachers used authentic instruction.

Ask volunteers to share examples of how they use authentic contexts for instruction in their classes.

8. Evaluation, Readings for Session Two, and Closure

(10 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in the time left, you would like to get feedback from them about this first session.** You will use this feedback in shaping the next two sessions of the Study Circle.
- **Post the “Useful – How to Improve” newsprint.**

The image shows a rectangular newsprint template. At the top left, the word "Useful" is written and underlined. At the top right, the words "How To Improve" are written and underlined. The rest of the rectangle is empty, intended for handwritten notes. The bottom edge of the rectangle is wavy, suggesting it might be a piece of paper pinned to a wall.

Ask participants first to tell you what was useful or helpful to them about the design of this first session of the Study Circle. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "Useful."

- **Then ask participants for suggestions on how to improve this design.** Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "How To Improve." If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask the person to rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion on the newsprint.

Do not make any response to participants' comments during this evaluation. It is VERY important that you do not defend or justify anything you have done in the Study Circle or anything about the design, as this will cut off further suggestions. If anyone makes a suggestion you don't agree with, just nod your head. 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 . . . ? Is that right?"

Note to Facilitator

Save this newsprint and copy participants' comments into the Feedback Form you submit to NCSALL at the end of the Study Circle.

-  **Give each participant a copy of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom*.** Tell them that **Reading #2** will be Chapter 3, “Using Authentic Materials and Activities in the Classroom” (entire chapter) and Chapter 4, “Authentic Thematic Activities for the Classroom” (pp. 67-69 and pp. 78-87). Ask them to be ready to discuss “Theme Two: Parenting and Family” using the questions from the earlier activity “Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts”:
 - How were the teaching and learning authentic? Consider the materials, the activities, and whose purposes were addressed.
 - What “basic skills” were being learned or practiced? How were they being learned or practiced?
-  **Refer participants to Handout D: “Schedule/To Do Form”** that was included in their Pre-Meeting Packet. Find out if they have any questions about what they are to do before the next session. Thank them for the preparation they did for this first session.
- **Repeat the date, time, and place for the next session.** If applicable, explain to them the process you will use for canceling and rescheduling the next session 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.

Session Two – Preparation



Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time)

- ___ Objectives for Session Two (p. 28)
- ___ Session Two Agenda (p. 29)
- ___ Comparing Two Studies (p. 30)



Handouts (Make copies for each participant)

- ___ Handout G: “Real-Life? Authentic? Contextualized?”
- ___ Handout H: “*What Works* Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students”
- ___ Handout I: “Planning Form”

(Also, make a few extra copies of Handouts E and F for participants who forget to bring theirs. These handouts are in Appendix C.)



Readings

- ___ Reading #3: *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom*: Chapter 2, “Getting To Know Students” (entire chapter)

(Have a few extra copies of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom* for participants who forget to bring theirs.)

Materials

- ___ Blank newsprint sheets
- ___ Newsprint easel
- ___ Markers, pens, tape

Session Two – Session Guide

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Participants will gain a greater understanding of how authentic contexts can frame instruction.
 - Participants will gain a greater understanding of the theory on which authentic instruction is based.
 - Participants will consider additional research on using authentic materials for instruction.

TIME: 3 hours

STEPS:

1. Welcome, Session Two Objectives, and Agenda (10 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** back to the Study Circle. If the group is more than a few people and a significant amount of time has passed since the last meeting, you may want to ask participants to re-introduce themselves.
- **Post the “Objectives for Session Two” newsprint.** Go over the objectives briefly with the group.

Another idea

Ask participants to re-introduce themselves and share any ideas they tried from Session 1.

Objectives for Session Two

Participants will:

- Gain a greater understanding of how authentic contexts can frame instruction.
- Gain a greater understanding of the theory on which authentic instruction is based.
- Consider additional research on using authentic materials for instruction

- **Post the “Session Two Agenda” newsprint.** Describe each activity briefly. Ask if people have any questions about the agenda.

Session Two Agenda

- Objectives for Session Two (Done!)
- Overview of Agenda (Doing)
- Theme-Based Authentic Instruction
- What Is Real-Life Instruction?

BREAK

- Additional Research
- Implication for Your Work
- Evaluation, Readings for Session Three, and Closure

2. Theme-Based Authentic Instruction

(40 minutes)

- **Discuss the parenting and family example of theme-based authentic instruction** in Reading #2 that people read for today. Use these questions to guide the discussion:
 - ? How was instruction authentic – materials, content, activities?
 - ? What basic skills were learned/practiced? How?
- **Discuss how a teacher using theme-based authentic instruction could make sure that students are learning what they need to learn over time.** For example, how could a teacher include authentic materials and activities in a curriculum that addresses preparation for the GED test or an ESL curriculum that is required by the adult education program?

Note to Facilitator

List participants' responses to “What basic skills were learned/practiced?” on newsprint.

3. Real-Life? Authentic? Contextualized? (20 minutes)

- Explain to participants that the purpose of this activity is **to give them an opportunity to reflect on how they use real-life materials in their instruction.** Suggest to the group that adult educators use real-life materials and contexts in a variety of ways.
-  **Distribute Handout G: “Real-Life? Authentic? Contextualized?”** Give participants a few minutes to read the handout.
- Ask for a show of hands of how many people found themselves in one of the examples described in the handout. Then ask if anyone wants to share what they discovered about how they have used real-life materials or how they might use them in their teaching.

BREAK: 15 minutes

4. Other Research on Contextualized Instruction (35 minutes)

-  **Distribute Handout H: “What Works Study for Adult ESL Students.”** Ask participants to take a few minutes to read the handout. Then lead a brief discussion about the ways in which the *What Works* study supports the use of authentic materials and activities.
- **Post the “Comparing Two Studies” newsprint.**

Comparing Two Studies	
	<u>Literacy Practice of Adults</u> <u>What Works Study for Adult ESL Students</u>
Questions Addressed:	
Methodology:	
Findings:	

Note to Facilitator

You may want to prepare two newsprints, one for each study. List these topics on each and then note people’s responses regarding each of the studies.

- Explain to participants that, in this activity, **they will compare this study** to the *Literacy Practice of Adult Learners* study that they reviewed during Session One. Ask them to consider the items below for each of the studies and note their responses on the newsprint:
 - the question addressed
 - the methodology
 - the findings

5. Implications for Your Own Work

(45 minutes)

-  **Distribute Handout I: Planning Form.** Tell participants that in this activity they will consider implications of the research for their own practice. Ask each person to list his or her own instructional strategies for math, reading, and writing on this Planning Form. They should briefly write how they teach or structure learning in each of these areas.
- **Then ask participants to write ideas** about how to make teaching and learning in their class more contextual, i.e. how they might use more authentic materials and purposes. Suggest that they may want to review the ideas in Chapter 3 of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom*.
- **Working in pairs, ask participants to share their ideas** about making teaching and learning in their class more contextual. Allow about ten minutes for this sharing.
- **Ask for volunteers to share** any ideas they think they may try with the entire group.

6. Evaluation, Readings for Session Three, and Closure

(15 minutes)

Using the “Session Two Agenda” newsprint, ask participants for a thumbs up, down, or level to show their reaction to the activities. Quickly total the responses on the newsprint: +, -, or N for neutral. Ask for suggestions for improvements.

-  **Tell participants that in the next session they will be discussing the second chapter of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom*: “Getting to Know Students.”** Ask them to read this chapter in preparation for Session Three and consider how the ideas presented in this chapter might be applied in their class or program.
-  **Refer participants to Handout D: “Schedule/To Do Form.”** To the best of your ability, be sure that participants are clear about what they are being asked to do before the next meeting. Thank them for the preparation they did for this session.
- **Repeat the date, time, and place for the next session.** If applicable, explain the process you will use for canceling and rescheduling the next session 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.

Session Three – Preparation



Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time)

- ___ Objectives for Session Three (p. 35)
- ___ Session Three Agenda (p. 35)
- ___ Implementing Authentic Instruction: Constraints and Supports (p. 37)
- ___ Next Steps (p. 38)
- ___ Ideas for Our Group's Next Steps (p. 39)



Handouts

(There are no new handouts to prepare for this session.)

(Make a few extra copies of Handouts G-I for participants who forget to bring theirs. These handouts are in Appendix D.)



Readings

(There are no new readings to prepare for this session.)

(Have a few extra copies of *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom* for participants who forget to bring theirs.)

Materials

- ___ 4" x 6" sticky note pads (or blank strips of paper)
- ___ Blank newsprint sheets
- ___ Newsprint easel
- ___ Markers, pens, tape

Session Three – Session Guide

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Participants will explore ways to learn about students' contexts.
 - Participants will strategize about how to decrease barriers and increase supports for using authentic contexts and materials in teaching.
 - Participants will plan the next steps they want to take for using authentic instruction their programs.
 - Participants will make a plan for the group's next steps.

TIME: 3 hours

STEPS:

1. Welcome, Session Three Objectives, and Agenda (10 minutes)

- **Welcome participants back to the Study Circle.** If the group is more than a few people and a significant amount of time has passed since the last meeting, you may want to ask participants to re-introduce themselves.

Have each participant share a thought they have had about authentic instruction since the last Study Circle meeting.

- **Post the “Objectives for Session Three” newsprint.** Go over the objectives briefly with the group.

Objectives for Session Three

Participants will:

- Explore ways to learn about students' contexts.
- Strategize about how to decrease barriers and increase supports for using authentic contexts and materials in teaching.
- Plan the next steps they want to take for using authentic instruction in their programs
- Make a plan for the group's next steps

- **Post the “Session Three Agenda” newsprint.** Describe each activity briefly. Ask if people have any questions about the agenda.

Session Three Agenda

- Objectives for Session Three (Done!)
 - Overview of Agenda (Doing)
 - Learning About Student's Contexts
 - Implementing Authentic Teaching and Learning in Your Contexts: Constraints and Supports
- BREAK
- Action Planning
 - A Plan for Our Group
 - Final Evaluation

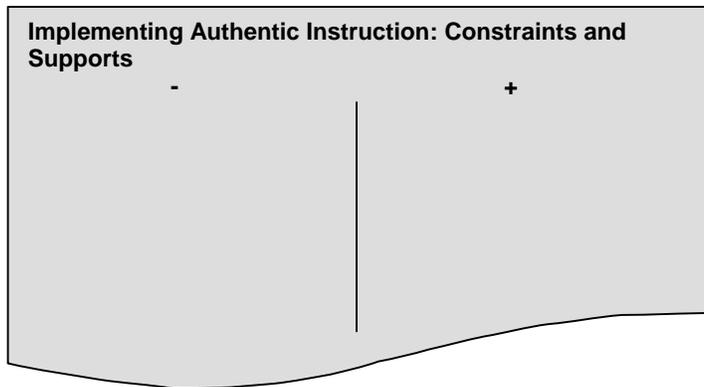
2. Learning about Students' Contexts (30 minutes)

- **Explain that in this activity** participants will consider their how they approach intake and in-class activities that might help them learn about their students' life contexts.
- **Working in pairs, ask participants to describe** the intake process in their class or program. Next ask them to consider ways they might change the process to give them more insight into students' goals and lives and the literacy practices students do and want to do.
- **In the same pairs, ask participants to share** activities they have done in class that helped them know about their students' literacy practices, goals, and lives. Then ask them to think of other activities they might try.
- **Ask the group** to come back together and share any new ideas they had about ways they to better learn about their students. List their responses on newsprint.
- **Ask participants if they have any concerns** about how personal information – theirs or their students' – might be shared in class. Discuss as time allows.

3. Implementing Authentic Teaching and Learning In Your Contexts: Constraints and Supports (35 minutes)

- **Explain that during the next activity, called a “force field analysis,”** they will brainstorm and strategize about how to deal with factors that might hinder or support them in implementing authentic instruction in their own classes and programs. Examples of constraints (factors that might hinder them) could be student resistance and lack of preparation time. An example of a support (a factor that might help them) could be ongoing communication with other members of this Study Circle.

- **Post the “Implementing Authentic Instruction: Constraints and Supports” newsprint.**



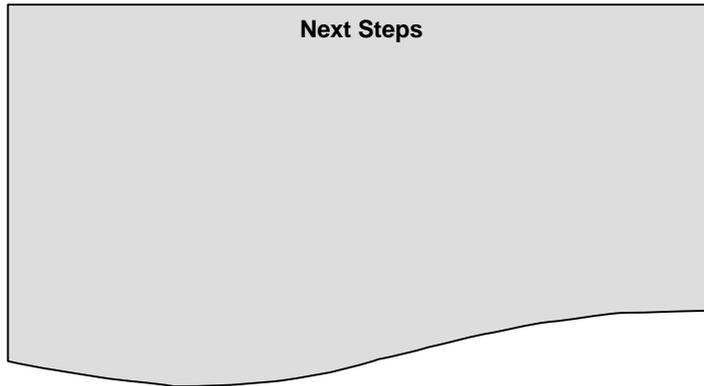
- **Ask the group to begin by brainstorming all of the constraints they may face when implementing authentic instruction.** These could be classroom constraints, program constraints, or policy constraints. Write each constraint mentioned under the minus sign on the left side of the newsprint. Take no more than five minutes to list constraints.
- **Then, ask the group to brainstorm all of the supports they may have when implementing authentic instruction.** Write these up on the right side of the newsprint, under the plus sign. Take no more than five minutes to list supports.
- **Lead a discussion with the whole group about how constraining forces can be reduced and how supporting forces can be increased.** This discussion should be based on the notion that, although many constraining forces cannot be removed or eliminated (such as lack of time), it may be possible to reduce or lessen them through actions the teachers or their programs can take.

BREAK: 15 minutes

4. Action Planning

(45 minutes)

- **Post the “Next Steps” newsprint.**



- **Tell participants that, in this next activity, they will be working in pairs to develop a list of the next steps they would like to take for implementing authentic teaching and learning in their own instructional setting or program.**

Explain that for some people the next step may be just to think more about whether more authentic teaching is feasible for them. For others it may include continuing to learn more about how to do it. Or it may be to have a discussion with other teachers in their program about how to start. Some participants may have specific ideas about activities, techniques or strategies they could begin to use in their classes.

- **Divide the group into pairs**, preferably pairing teachers who teach in the same context (e.g., two ESOL teachers, two GED teachers, etc.). Explain that they will have 20 minutes, working with their partner, to make a plan for the next steps or actions they will take to use authentic teaching and learning in their work. Each teacher should make some notes on paper. Remind them that they will be asked to share something from their plan with the other participants.

Another Idea

Conduct a brainstorming session with the entire group to generate this list of action steps.

Note to Facilitator

As a “product” of this Study Circle, participants might want to collect these Next Steps into a document that could be used as a discussion catalyst for other Study Circle groups.

- **After 20 minutes, reconvene the group.** Ask the first pair to read aloud their first idea for next steps and write it on newsprint. (It may be necessary to paraphrase for the newsprint.) Ask the next pair to read aloud one of their ideas and add it to the newsprint list. Continue around the group, going back to every pair until a list of all the ideas has been written on the newsprint.
- **Have participants consider the help they may need to** implement these next steps, for example, materials, resources, contact with other teachers, etc. Encourage discussion about ways to get supports that are needed. Repost the “Supports and Constraints” newsprint from Session Two and add these supports to the newsprint.

Note to Facilitator**Optional Session Four**

You may want to suggest scheduling a fourth session to give participants the opportunity to share their experiences implementing authentic activities and materials in their classes. They could bring examples to share of what they have tried as well as challenges they would like the group’s help in addressing.

If the group is interested in this session, you should try to schedule it now.

5. A Plan for Our Group

(30 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint “Ideas for Our Group’s Next Steps.”**

Ideas for Our Group’s Next Steps

- Schedule a follow-up meeting to share what happened when participants enacted their individual plans.
- Organize an e-mail list so participants can stay in touch and share ideas via e-mail.
- Summarize what we’ve learned – something practical – that can be shared with other practitioners or policymakers in our programs or in the state.

Explain that now that the individual participants have plans for what they will do when back in their classrooms and programs, the group needs to make a plan about its next steps.

- **Ask the group if they want to add other ideas** to this list for the group to consider. Write them up on the newsprint. When the list is complete, suggest to the group that they choose one or two to implement, and that you will use “dot” voting to do this.
- **Hand out a sticky “dots” to each participant** and ask them to put their dot next to the idea they would most like the group to do. If they don’t want to do any of the activities, they should not put their “dot” on the newsprint.

Note to Facilitator

If the group chooses to schedule a follow-up meeting or an e-mail list, then the third option—producing a summary—can be done at the follow-up meeting or via e-mail. If the group decides not to meet again, they could brainstorm their summary in the next few minutes.

- **Lead the group in organizing its choice:**
 - If they choose to schedule a follow-up meeting, set the date, time and place for the meeting, and brainstorm an agenda for the meeting. Determine who will definitely be coming, and who will take the responsibility to cancel the meeting in case of bad weather.
 - If they chose to organize an e-mail list, pass around a sheet for everyone to write their e-mail address. Decide who is going to start the first posting, and discuss what types of discussions or postings people would like to see (e.g., questions about how to try out something in their classroom, describing what happened after they tried it, sharing other resources they might find about teaching and learning in authentic contexts, etc.).
 - If they chose to produce a list of strategies or policy changes, put up a blank sheet of newsprint and start the brainstorm. When the brainstorm is done, have participants decide as a group what they want to do with the list (e.g., someone type it up and send around to people so they can share with other teachers in their program, send it to the State Department of Education to reprint in the state newsletter, send it with someone's program director to the next state-wide directors' meeting; forward to the next reading study circle organized by the state, etc.).

6. Final Evaluation

(15 minutes)

- **Go around the circle and ask each person to comment on the most useful idea or concept they will walk away with from this Study Circle.**

Go around again and ask if anyone has suggestions for improving the Study Circle. These suggestions may be related to:

- the PROCESS (the activities, the way readings were organized, etc.) or
- the CONTENT (the specific readings chosen, the clarity or richness of the readings or handouts, the focus of the discussions, etc.)
- **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 may find useful. Point out that NCSALL publications are also available online at the NCSALL Web site or may be obtained by contacting NCSALL at World Education. The address is on page i of this Study Guide.
- **Thank everyone** for coming and participating in this Study Circle.

Note to Facilitator

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.

Another Idea

Pass out sticky notes and ask people to write down their ideas, comments, or suggestions. Use one Post-it note for each comment or suggestion.

As participants are working, put several blank newsprint sheets up on the wall.

Then ask participants to stick up their comments and suggestions on a blank sheet of newsprint, giving people time at the end to read the comments and talk with each other about them.

