

Appendix B

To be sent to participants
two weeks before first session

Pre-Meeting Packet of Readings and Handouts

**Participants need to receive this packet at least ten days
before the first session of the Study Circle.**

Contents

Cover letter: “Information about the Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle”

Handout A: “What is a Study Circle?”

Handout B: “What Study Circles Are, and Are Not: A Comparison”

Handout C: “The Role of the Participant”

Handout D: “Schedule/To Do Form”

Reading #1: “Taking Literacy Skills Home”

Date:

RE: Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle

Dear Participant:

Thank you for registering to participate in the **Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts Study Circle**. I really look forward to working with you. This Study Circle was developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) as part of its Connecting Practice, Policy and Research Initiative (CPPR). The goal of the CPPR is to integrate research-based materials into practice and to ensure that research findings are turned into strategies and techniques that are useful to adult educators.

This Study Circle will meet three times. The first session will be held at _____ (location) _____ on _____ (date) _____ at _____ (time) _____. The session will last about three hours.

At each session, we will be discussing readings about using authentic materials and contexts in teaching. Before the first session, please read the three enclosed handouts on study circles and Reading #1, "Taking Literacy Skills Home." We will discuss this article in the first session.

I have enclosed a folder for keeping all of the materials for this Study Circle. Please bring this folder and all the materials with you to each of our sessions.

If you have any questions about the Study Circle in general or about what to do before our first session, please call me at YOUR PHONE NUMBER or send me an email at YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS.

I'm looking forward to some great discussions with all of you.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME AND TITLE



What is a study circle?

A study circle:

- is a process for small-group deliberation that is voluntary and participatory;
- is a small group, usually 8 to 12 participants;
- is led by a facilitator who is impartial, who helps manage the deliberation process, but is not an "expert" or "teacher" in the traditional sense;
- considers many perspectives, rather than advocating a particular point of view;
- uses ground rules to set the tone for a respectful, productive discussion;
- is rooted in dialogue and deliberation, not debate;
- has multiple sessions which move from personal experience of the issue, to considering multiple viewpoints, to strategies for action;
- does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern;
- provides an opportunity for citizens to work together to improve their community.



What study circles are, and are not: A comparison

A study circle IS:

- a **small-group discussion** involving deliberation and problem solving, in which an issue is examined from many perspectives; it is enriched by the members' knowledge and experience, and often informed by expert information and discussion materials; it is aided by an impartial facilitator whose job is to manage the discussion.

A study circle is NOT the same as:

- **conflict resolution**, a set of principles and techniques used in resolving conflict between individuals or groups. (Study circle facilitators and participants sometimes use these techniques in study circles.)
- **mediation**, a process used to settle disputes that relies on an outside neutral person to help the disputing parties come to an agreement. (Mediators often make excellent study circle facilitators, and have many skills in common.)
- a **focus group**, a small group usually organized to gather or test information from the members. Respondents (who are sometimes paid) are often recruited to represent a particular viewpoint or target audience.
- **traditional education with teachers and pupils**, where the teacher or an expert imparts knowledge to the students.
- a **facilitated meeting with a predetermined outcome**, such as a committee or board meeting with goals established ahead of time. A study circle begins with a shared interest among its members, and unfolds as the process progresses.
- a **town meeting**, a large-group meeting which is held to get public input on an issue, or to make a decision on a community policy.
- a **public hearing**, a large-group public meeting which allows concerns to be aired.



The role of the participant

The following points are intended to help you, the participant, make the most of your study circle experience, and to suggest ways in which you can help the group

- **Listen carefully to others.** Try to understand the concerns and values that underlie their views.
- **Maintain an open mind.** You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your early statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have rejected or not considered in the past.
- **Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.** Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other participants' points of view and why they feel the way they do.
- **Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks are relevant.
- **Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the discussion.** Make sure you are giving others the chance to speak.
- **Address your remarks to the group members rather than the facilitator.** Feel free to address your remarks to a particular participant, especially one who has not been heard from or who you think may have special insight. Don't hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas.
- **Communicate your needs to the facilitator.** The facilitator is responsible for guiding the discussion, summarizing key ideas, and soliciting clarification of unclear points, but he/she may need advice on when this is necessary. Chances are, you are not alone when you don't understand what someone has said.
- **Value your own experience and opinions.** Don't feel pressured to speak, but realize that failing to speak means robbing the group of your wisdom.
- **Engage in friendly disagreement.** Differences can invigorate the group, especially when it is relatively homogeneous on the surface. Don't hesitate to challenge ideas you disagree with, and don't take it personally if someone challenges your ideas.

Schedule/To Do Form

What To Do To Get Ready

Session	Date	What to do before session
Session One		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Handouts A, B, and C and Reading #1: “Taking Literacy Skills Home” that you received in the Pre-Meeting Packet. • Highlight interesting points and jot down any questions that come to mind.
Session Two		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading #2: <i>Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 3 – Read entire chapter • Chapter 4 – Read pp. 67-69 and 78-87 • As you read these sections, consider how the teaching and learning is authentic and how basic skills could be addressed.
Session Three		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading #3: <i>Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 2 – Read entire chapter • Consider how the ideas presented in this chapter might be applied in your class or program.

Taking Literacy Skills Home*

[* From *Focus on Basics*, Vol. 4, Issue D, April 2001.]

NCSALL research finds that use of authentic reading materials in class increases learners' out-of-class literacy activities

by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson, & Marta Soler

“Before, I would get letters from the children’s school and I needed someone [to] read them to me in order to know what they were asking me to do. Now I don’t need it.”

“I can write a check now.”

“I can look at a map now and use road signs.”

“I just started using calendars and appointment books.”

“I can pick up a newspaper and read the headline now.”

“Now I can pick up my Bible, and I can read a scripture.”

“I can go to a lunch counter and look on the bulletin board and read it now.”

These are just a few of the comments made by adult literacy students who participated in a National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)-sponsored study, Literacy Practice of Adult Learners (LPALS). The study looked at changes in the literacy practices of adults as a result of attending adult literacy classes. Results show that students who participate in classes in which real-life literacy activities and texts are used increase the frequency with which they read and write in their daily lives. Such learners also expand the variety of texts they read and write outside of school. This is in comparison to results in students who participate in classes with fewer or no real-life literacy activities and texts.

By looking at these changes, LPALS was measuring an important — one could argue that it is the most important — outcome of adult literacy instruction: the actual application of newly learned literacy skills. Rather than inferring from other outcome measures, such as achievement tests, that literacy skills are applied in day-to-day life, this study looked at those applications directly. It looked at whether or not the adult learners actually use their new literacy skills to achieve their own personal goals, meet their own needs, and participate more fully in their personal and family life.

The significance of the results goes beyond the adult learners to encompass issues of intergenerational literacy success and failure. Children who grow up in homes where adults read and write more, and read and write more types of texts (e.g., coupons, recipes, correspondence, documents, magazine articles, books, etc.) learn more about the conceptual bases of reading and writing than those in homes where adults read and write less. Children who begin school with higher levels of literacy knowledge and familiarity are more successful at learning to read and write.

The Participants

The LPALS research team collected data on out-of-school literacy practices from 173 adults attending 83 different classes across the United States. The adult literacy students represented the range of students in the various types of adult literacy classes in the United States today. They were both native-born and foreign-born and ranged in age from 18 to 68 years. They were currently learning in classes or in tutorial arrangements that reflected a range of configurations: adult basic education (ABE), preparation for tests of General Educational Development (GED), family literacy, Evenstart, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Upon beginning the classes they were attending, the literacy levels of the participants ranged from preliterate (19.1%) to a level of 11th grade and up (7.5%). The majority of the students were reported by their teachers to be reading around the fourth to seventh grade levels (31.2%) when they first began attending the class involved in the study. Women made up 70% of the sample.

Dimensions of Instruction

To relate changes in adult literacy students' literacy practices to the types of instruction they were receiving, the student participants and their current literacy class teachers were recruited to the study together. Teachers of adult literacy volunteered for the project in response to calls put out through the NCSALL network as well as through contacts known to members of the research team. A class, or site, was defined as one teacher and at least one student working together. Thus, among the 83 classes, about one-third of them were configured as tutor-tutee, a common instructional approach in adult basic education.

The LPALS team thought that two dimensions of adult literacy instruction might relate to change in literacy practice. The first was authenticity of instruction, or how close the activities and texts used in the class are to actual literacy practice in the world outside of formal schooling. The second dimension was the degree of collaboration that existed between the students and the teachers: the degree to which students and teachers share decision-making for all aspects of their program, including assessment, goal-setting, activities, texts, and program governance. These two dimensions were chosen because they represent best practice among many adult literacy theorists, researchers, and practitioners, and a logical argument can be made for their relationship to literacy practice change among students. Many believe that if adult students are given the opportunity to request instruction around specific texts and activities that are personally important and relevant to them, if they feel a sense of ownership in their schooling, and if they learn the skills of reading and writing through reading and writing real-world texts for real-world purposes, they will be more likely to apply their reading and writing abilities in their lives outside of school. Examples of real life texts include newspapers, driver's license manuals, recipes; real-world purposes include reading newspapers to learn about the news, reading recipes in order to actually cook something. (For a fuller description, see *Focus on Basics*, 2B, pp. 11-14, and 3D, pp. 26-27.)

Each class in the study was assigned a score that reflected the class's location along a continuum of practice for each dimension. For authenticity, the four possible scores were 1) highly authentic; 2) somewhat authentic; 3) somewhat school-only; 4) highly school-only. For collaboration, the four possible scores were 1) highly collaborative; 2) somewhat collaborative;

3) somewhat teacher-directed; 4) highly teacher-directed. These scores were used in the subsequent analysis.

Change

Data collectors visited the volunteer participants in their homes at the beginning of their participation in literacy class and at the end. They asked if students were reading or writing any new types of material since they started attending the literacy class they were currently attending (and on which data had been collected). This information was gathered with the use of a structured questionnaire that asked questions about 50 different literacy practices. The data collector then sent the completed questionnaire to the research office for coding. Each participant was paid \$10 per interview.

Results showed that the degree of authenticity in adult literacy instruction had a moderate statistically significant effect on literacy practice change. This was true after controlling for the other factors that also showed independent significant effects on literacy practice change. These factors included literacy level of the student when beginning the program; number of days the student had attended the program; and the non-ESOL status of the student. The degree of collaboration between students and teachers showed no relationship with literacy practice change.

Independent effects are those effects that, after controlling for all other variables that were statistically significantly related to change in literacy practice, are also significantly related to change in literacy practice. The strongest independent effect was students' literacy level when they began the classes. The lower the literacy level at the beginning, the greater the change in literacy practices reported by students. This makes intuitive sense: students who are unable to read or write much at all will not be able to engage in many outside-of-school literacy practices. However, as they gain skill, they will

Using Authentic Materials: Karen

Karen teaches an adult literacy class to a group of women in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in a large city. Issues that arise in the neighborhood often influence the direction that the class goes on any given day. For example, one day some of the students came to class very disturbed. A young girl in the neighborhood had been assaulted. The learners felt that the police, the school, and the community were being very passive about the case. Many women in the class have daughters about the same age as the assault victim, and as they learned more about the case, they, too, became very upset. Karen realized that this issue really mattered to the students, so she devoted much of the next week's instruction to learning more about this case. She brought in different newspapers that covered the case for the students to read and discuss. The class decided to write a letter to the editor about the incident. As the class wrote the letter together, Karen took the opportunity to teach a short lesson on writing a business letter, as well as to go over some spelling patterns. Karen also proposed that the class do some research on issues of women's rights and safety.

Using the Internet as well as other resources, the class spent much time reading about and discussing these issues. At the same time, Karen pulled out unfamiliar vocabulary words from the different resources to work on with the students. Karen likes the fact that she can cover the reading and writing skills that her students need within a context that interests and motivates her students.

begin to use that skill for many of the basic literacy practices — reading signs, food labels, and others — that, across all of our participants, were for the most part already engaged in by the time students began their reading classes.

Complementing this effect was the fact that the longer the students had attended their classes, the more change in literacy practices they reported. Again, this makes intuitive sense if one concludes that low-skilled students will begin to pick up basic literacy practices and then add to them over time as their skill continues to increase.

The negative effect of ESOL status on change in literacy practices means that ESOL students enrolled in ESOL classes were less likely to report changes in literacy practices than were other students. This is probably because many of the ESOL students in the participant pool were already engaging in many literacy practices in their native languages by the time they began their ESOL classes, and focused instead on learning to read and write in English. The final participant pool included relatively few ESOL students so this effect is probably more of an artifact of the data-gathering for this study rather than a finding that one would wish to generalize to all ESOL students, according to Purcell-Gates.

Authentic Literacy Instruction

These results provide empirical justification for teachers to include real-life literacy activities and texts in their classes. What do these classes look like that do include authentic literacy instruction? The most authentic classes use many types of texts that occur naturally in the lives of people outside of the classroom. For example, some teachers use actual newspapers, magazines, work manuals, job applications, and coupons for literacy instruction. Furthermore, these texts are often, if not always, used for the actual purposes they are used in real life. Newspapers are read to find out about the news, the weather, or current issues of importance and interest to the students. Driver's manuals are read to prepare for an actual driver's test. Job applications are read and filled in as part of real-life job searches. Stories or reports are written and actually published in

Using Authentic Materials: Peter & Christine

Peter and Christine teach an adult basic education class in a large working-class community 40 miles from a large city. The students in their class come from a wide range of backgrounds and they all read at different levels. One of Peter and Christine's major challenges is using materials and activities that reflect the lives of all of their learners. They address this challenge by providing a lot of class time for students to explore their own interests and needs. For example, they have a computer teacher come in once a week to work with individual students on exploring the Internet. The students choose what topics they would like to learn more about, and the computer teacher helps them to access that information. One student wanted to learn more about child support and the laws that enforce payment of child support. The time she spent researching on the Internet helped this student to learn about the laws and also find available resources for helping her to obtain back payments from her ex-husband. Peter and Christine also provide time during each class for students to bring in materials they want to read or write. For instance, one student is trying to upgrade his trucking license, and to do so he needs to pass a test. He brings the test preparation manual to class each night to read during this time. Another student uses the time to write letters to her family in El Salvador. Peter and Christine, as well as a couple of tutors, provide assistance to the students, as needed, during this time. While much of the class time is spent doing whole class activities, such as reading novels or sharing their writing, the students also appreciate the time they have to explore materials of individual, personal interest to them.

newspapers or journals connected with the literacy program. Novels are read and discussed in response groups similar to adult book clubs that exist outside of schools.

The next most authentic classrooms used more real-life texts than published textbooks and workbooks but did not use real-life texts exclusively. While the majority of the activities in these classrooms centered around authentic texts, the texts were not always used for authentic purposes. Rather, the activities sometimes mimicked real-life uses of these texts. For example, students wrote letters to an editor of a newspaper in the form found in real newspapers, but the letters were not actually sent.

The results of this study suggest that teachers of adult literacy may want to begin to increase the degree to which they include real-life literacy activities and texts in their classes. These results do not indicate that this is an all-or-nothing change. They indicate that the degree to which authentic literacy activities and texts are included in the instruction is important to think about when teaching for actual use of reading and writing skills outside of the classroom. The LPALS team is currently preparing a teacher handbook designed to help adult literacy teachers apply the results of this study to their own practice.

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Victoria Purcell-Gates is Professor of literacy at Michigan State University. She is the author of *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (1995; Harvard University Press) and (with co-author, Robin Waterman) *Now We Read, We See, We Speak: Portrait of Literacy Development in an Adult Freirean-Based Class* (2000, Lawrence Erlbaum Press).

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