NCSALL Study Circle Guide: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education

January 2000

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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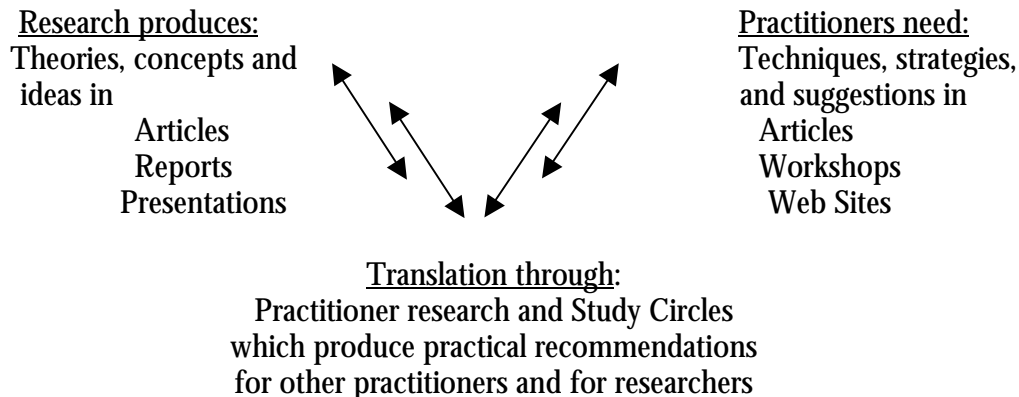(617) 495-4843
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Goal of NCSALL Study Circles

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:

Research produces:
Theories, concepts and
    ideas in
        Articles
        Reports
        Presentations

Practitioners need:
Techniques, strategies,
    and suggestions in
        Articles
        Workshops
        Web Sites

Translation through:
Practitioner research and Study Circles
which produce practical recommendations
for other practitioners and for researchers

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

<u>Objectives:</u>

- 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.

<u>Time:</u>   2.5-3 hours

<u>Materials:</u>

- 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)

<u>Steps:</u>

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 <u>not a training</u> 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 <u>what they are accountable for in their work</u>. 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 <u>to whom are they accountable</u>. 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 <u>comes out</u> of the program, usually changes in learner(s) lives, not what <u>goes in</u>, 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:

Good	How to Improve

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

<u>Objectives:</u>

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

<u>Time:</u>   2.5-3 hours

<u>Materials:</u>

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

<u>Steps:</u>

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.

WHAT	HOW
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:

Good	**How to Improve**

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

<u>Objectives:</u>

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

<u>Time:</u>   3 hours

<u>Materials:</u>

- Newsprint, pens, tape

<u>Steps:</u>

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 <u>what success in the context of adult literacy looks like</u>. 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

Appendix A

For recruitment

CONTENTS:

Study Circle on

Performance

Accountability

in Adult Basic

Education

Interested in discussing performance accountability in the context of ABE, ESOL and GED settings? Now's the time as states and programs continue to make decisions regarding the 1998 Workforce Investment Act!

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is sponsoring a Study Circle to engage ABE, ESOL and GED practitioners in discussing theories and concepts related to performance accountability. This topic is particularly relevant as states and programs continue to make plans and policy decisions regarding the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that has governed federal adult basic education spending since July 1, 1999.

In this study circle, a group of adult education practitioners will read the paper Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education and information on the WIA. We will meet to discuss the readings and their implications for our programs.

- Read and discuss articles on performance accountability, including NCSALL's current research on the topic.
- Consider strategies for learning more about the issue from the learners with whom you work.
- Discuss what the theories and practices mean for our own classrooms and programs.
- Provide feedback and practical suggestions to NCSALL.

The study circle is organized into three sessions of approximately 3 hours each. Practitioners will be asked to read 2-4 articles before each session for discussion during the study circle. There is space for up to 8 practitioners to participate. We ask that you attend all three sessions.

- In the first session, we will discuss portions of Contested Ground, which examines performance accountability in adult basic education. We will explore what kind of system would meet the needs of everyone involved in this field.
- In the second session, we will read information about New Literacy Studies and the WIA and we will discuss the capacity of adult basic education programs to measure their performance.
- In the final session, we will discuss the recommendations in Contested Ground and discuss their relevance for our own work. We will develop a final product, such as a recommendation for our local or state system of accountability.

This is a staff development activity. CEUs or PDPs may be available.
The dates and locations of the three study circle sessions are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If you would like to join the study circle, please complete this form and send it to: YOUR NAME, NCSALL Practitioner Learner, YOUR ADDRESS by DEADLINE. I can also be reached at YOUR PHONE NUMBER and YOUR E-MAIL.

Name: _____ Position: _____
Home address: _____ Home phone: _____
Work phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Appendix B

CONTENTS:

- ➤ Cover letter *Information about the Performance Accountability Study Circle*
- ➤ *What is a Study Circle?* by the Study Circle Resource Center (Handout #1)
- ➤ *What Study Circles are, and are not: A comparison* by the Study Circle Resource Center (Handout #2)
- ➤ T*he role of the participant* by the Study Circle Resource Center (Handout #3)
- ➤ Juliet Merrifield, *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education* (Reading #1)
- ➤ Folder for holding all readings and handouts

Dear Participant:

Thank you for registering to participate in the Performance Accountability Study Circle. I really look forward to meeting with you. This Study Circle was developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), through its Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN). The goal of the PDRN is to develop partnerships between university researchers and practitioners, promote practitioner research, and help practitioners use research results in their work in adult basic education.

I believe there will be <u>NUMBER OF</u> teachers participating in the Study Circle. We will meet three times. The first meeting is at <u>LOCATION</u> on <u>MONTH/DAY/YEAR</u> at <u>TIME</u>.

At each session, we will be discussing readings about performance accountability. Some of these have been produced by NCSALL and some are from other sources. I will be providing you with copies of both types of readings.

Before the first meeting, I'd like to ask you to read the three handouts on Study Circles. Also, **please read pages 1-25** in Juliet Merrifield's report *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education*. We will be discussing these at the first meeting.

I have enclosed a folder for you to keep all of the materials for this Study Circle. Please bring this and all readings with you to all of our meetings.

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

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.

Click **here** for:

NCSALL Report #1

Contested Ground:
Performance Accountability
in Adult Basic Education

by

Juliet Merrifield
Center for Literacy Studies
University of Tennessee

Appendix C

<u>To be handed out on Day One of the Study Circle</u>

CONTENTS:

- ➤ *List of Readings to be Read for Days Two and Three* (Handout #4)
- ➤ *Sample Ground Rules* by the Study Circle Resource Center (Handout #5)
- ➤ National Institute for Literacy's <u>Policy Update</u> "Workforce Investment Act Offers Opportunities for Adult and Family Literacy" (Reading #2)

List of Readings to be Read for Day Two and Day Three

To be read before Day Two:

In *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education,*

- Read pages 26-39

- Skim pages 39-46

- Read pages 46-55.

To be read before Day Three:

In *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education*

Read pages 56-78.

◇ Sample ground rules

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.

- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

- Share "air time."

- If you are offended, say so; and say why.

- You can disagree, but don't personalize it; stick to the issue. No name-calling or stereotyping.

- Speak for yourself, not for others.

- One person speaks at a time.

- What is said in the group stays here, unless everyone agrees to change that.

National Institute for Literacy

Reading #2

Policy Update

Workforce Investment Act Offers Opportunities for Adult and Family Literacy

--September 23, 1998--

Last month, the President signed the *Workforce Investment Act of 1998* into law. The new law consolidates over 50 employment, training, and literacy programs -- including the *National Literacy Act*, *Adult Education Act*, and *Job Training Partnership Act* -- into three block grants to states: one for adult education and family literacy, one for disadvantaged youth, and one for adult employment and training. Title II of the new law replaces the *Adult Education Act* and continues the federal investment in adult education and family literacy for five more years.

Many elements of the new law will have an impact on the adult education and family literacy system. For example, in order to maximize the integration of services for individuals, the law creates a collaborative planning process at the state level. While the planning process includes employment and training as well as adult education and literacy, the actual administration, operation, funding, and reporting of adult education and literacy remain separate.

This *Policy Update* focuses on Title II of the new law, the *Adult Education* and *Family Literacy Act.*

Goals

While the old *Adult Education Act* allowed states to use federal funds for family literacy services, the new law puts family literacy on equal footing with adult basic education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

The new law sets three goals for adult education and literacy:

1. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency.
2. Assist adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children.
3. Assist adults in completing high school or the equivalent.

Grant to States

Like the old *Adult Education Act*, the *Workforce Investment Act* authorizes the federal government to spend federal funds on adult education and literacy. Most of this federal investment is through the Adult Education State Grant program, which now totals $345 million annually. States each received from $668,054 (Alaska) to $38,209,485 (California) through this grant program this year. *(See Allotment Table for the amount your State receives--OVAE)*

Formula Change

The new law changes the formula the federal government uses to divide the Adult Education State Grant funding among states. The old formula took into account the number of adults age 16 and older in the state without a high school diploma (or the equivalent) and not enrolled in high school. The *Workforce Investment Act* changes the formula to include only adults age 16-61. This does not mean that states cannot continue to use these funds to serve adults over the age of 61. Rather, it just changes

how state allotments are calculated. As a result of this change, states with a large population over age 61 may receive a smaller percentage of Adult Education State Grant funds next year. Despite this change, the law requires that next year each state must receive at least 90 percent of the amount it received this year.

After receiving their federal allotments based on the formula, state agencies(1) use most of the funding to award grants to local programs through a competitive process. They can also use some of the funding for state leadership activities and state administrative activities. The following chart compares how states allocated their grant money under the *Adult Education Act* with how they are supposed to allocate it under the *Workforce Investment Act*.

Percent Under the Adult Education Act	Percent Under the Workforce Investment Act	Activity
80	82.5	Grants to local programs
15	12.5	State leadership activities
5	5	State administrative activities

Grants to Local Programs

The *Workforce Investment Act* establishes specific criteria for state agencies to consider in awarding grants to local programs. These criteria -- which include the program's past effectiveness, intensity, duration, and commitment to serving individuals most in need of literacy services -- are summarized in the form of a checklist attached to this report. Local programs are required to use the funds for adult education, family, workplace, ESL, and/or prison literacy services.

Organizations Eligible for Funding

The organizations listed below are eligible to apply to their state agency for federal funds. For information on how to apply in your state, contact your state director of adult education(2).

- Local education agencies
- Community-based organizations of demonstrated effectiveness
- Volunteer literacy organizations of demonstrated effectiveness
- Institutions of higher education
- Public or private nonprofit agencies
- Libraries
- Public housing authorities
- Consortiums of organizations listed above
- Other nonprofits that have the ability to provide literacy services

Direct and Equitable Access

Like the *Adult Education Act*, the *Workforce Investment Act* requires state agencies to give all of the eligible providers listed above an equal (i.e. "direct and equitable") opportunity to apply for the funds. The law goes on to require state agencies to ensure that the same grant/contract announcement and application processes are used for all eligible providers. It also requires state agencies to describe what steps they will take to ensure that the direct and equitable access provisions are carried out in the plans they submit to the Secretary of Education.

Literacy for Prisoners

The *Workforce Investment Act* repeals the prison literacy program, which in recent years has received $4.7 million annually. Under the *Adult Education Act*, states were required to use a minimum of 10

percent of their Adult Education State Grant for corrections education. The Workforce Investment Act allows states to use a maximum of 10 percent for this purpose.

State Leadership Activities

In addition to the grants to local providers, the law allows state agencies to use 12.5 percent of federal Adult Education State Grant funding to build local program capacity. States are encouraged to collaborate when possible, and can use funds for one or more of the following activities:

- Professional development programs that improve the quality of instruction
- Evaluating the quality of services
- Technical assistance to adult education and literacy programs
- Technology assistance, including staff training in use of technology
- Supporting state or regional literacy resource centers
- Incentives for program coordination, integration, and for performance
- Developing and disseminating curricula
- Coordinating with support services, such as child care and transportation
- Integrating literacy instruction and occupational training, including promoting linkage with employers
- Establishing linkages with postsecondary educational institutions, including community colleges
- Other statewide activities that support adult education and literacy

New Accountability System

One of the most important features of the *Workforce Investment Act* is the new comprehensive performance accountability system that it establishes. This new accountability system is designed to assess states' effectiveness in achieving continuous improvement of adult education and literacy activities funded by the federal government. The law lists specific performance measures by which states will be assessed. These include the following:

1. Demonstrated improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking in the English language, numeracy, problem-solving, English language acquisition and other literacy skills.
2. Placement, retention, or completion of postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement.
3. Receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent.
4. Other objective, quantifiable measures, as identified by the state agency. (Local providers can have input into the process of identifying other performance measures.)

Each state agency will negotiate with the Secretary of Education in setting expected levels of performance, and is required to submit an annual report on its progress. The Secretary of Education, in turn, will make the report available to the public and distribute it to Congress. Congress is likely to use this information in future funding decisions.

State Plan

Each state agency that applies for federal funds through this law is required to submit a 5-year plan for improving adult education and family literacy activities in the state. As they develop the plan, state agencies are expected to consult with literacy providers in the state. Plans are due to the Secretary of Education by April 1, 1999. In many states, planning is already underway under the leadership of the state director of adult education.

Each 5-year plan is required to include specific goals for the next three years, and will be evaluated on how well it meets these goals. In developing the plan, the state must include a description of the process that will be used for public participation and comment. The state agency must submit the plan to the Governor for review and comment before submitting it to the Secretary of Education.

The plan must include an objective assessment of the literacy needs of individuals in the state. In addition, it must include a description of each of the following:

- The adult education and family literacy activities that will be carried out with federal funds.
- How the state agency will evaluate the effectiveness of adult education and literacy activities (based on the performance measures).
- How the performance measures will ensure the improvement of adult education and literacy activities in the state.
- The process that will be used for public participation and comment on the plan.
- How the state agency will develop strategies to better serve low-income students, individuals with disabilities, single parents, displaced homemakers, individuals with multiple barriers to educational enhancement (including those with limited English proficiency).
- How adult education and literacy activities will be integrated with career development, employment and training, and other activities.
- Steps the state will take to ensure that all eligible providers have direct and equitable access through every step of the grant application process.

National Leadership Activities

The law reauthorizes both the National Institute for Literacy and the U.S. Department of Education's national leadership activities for five years.

National Institute for Literacy

The law directs the National Institute for Literacy to continue its efforts to strengthen the capacity of the literacy field through a variety of activities, including the following:

- Establishing a national electronic database (i.e. LINCS) that disseminates information to the broadest possible audience within the literacy field and includes a communication network (i.e. listservs) for literacy programs, providers, social service agencies, and students.
- Advising Congress and federal departments and agencies regarding development of policy with respect to literacy and basic skills.
- Providing policy and technical assistance to federal, state, and local entities for the improvement of policy and programs relating to literacy.
- Encouraging federal agencies to support literacy efforts.
- Helping establish a reliable and replicable literacy research agenda.

Department of Education

The law directs the Secretary of Education to ensure that the Department of Education continues to carry out its national literacy activities, including the following:

- Providing technical assistance to eligible providers in developing and using performance measures listed in this law.
- Providing technical assistance for professional development activities, and to develop, improve, identify, and disseminate the most successful methods and techniques for providing adult education and literacy services.
- Carrying out research, such as estimating the number of adults functioning at the lowest levels of literacy proficiency.
- Developing and replicating model programs, particularly those working with the learning disabled, ESL, and workplace populations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a copy of the *Workforce Investment Act*, go to *http://thomas.loc.gov* or call the House Document Room at 202-226-5200 and ask for Public Law 105-220.

For a more detailed summary of the legislation, see *http://www.naepdc.org*.

To be added to the mailing list for future *Policy Updates*, see *http://www.nifl.gov* or call 202-632-1500 and choose
option #1.

Special thanks to Jim Bowling for his assistance with this Policy Update.

Checklist for Programs Seeking Federal Adult Education and Literacy Grants

The following list is designed to help programs generally assess how well they are meeting criteria that the *Workforce Investment Act* requires state agencies to consider in awarding grants. This list is not all-inclusive, and programs considering applying for these grants should contact their state director of adult education for more specific information about grant requirements. (For information on how to contact the director of adult education in your state, see the *Directory of National and State Literacy Contacts*, available at www.nifl.gov or by calling 1-800-228-8813.)

1. _____ To what degree has your program established measurable goals for participant outcomes?

2. _____ Can your program demonstrate its past effectiveness in improving the literacy skills of adults and families?

3. _____ What is the level of commitment of your program to serving individuals most in need of literacy services?

4. _____ Is your program of sufficient intensity and duration for participants to achieve substantial learning gains?

5. _____ Are educational activities built on a strong foundation of research and effective educational practice?

6. _____ Do activities use computers and other advances in technology, as appropriate?

7. _____ Do students in your program have an opportunity to learn in "real life" contexts?

8. _____ Is your program staffed by well-trained instructors, administrators, and counselors?

9. _____ Does your program offer flexible schedules and support services (such as child care and transportation)?

10. _____ Does your program coordinate its activities with other available resources in the community, including postsecondary schools, elementary and secondary schools. One-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies?

Footnotes

1. The Workforce Investment Act defines the entity that receives and distributes the money--referred to in this Policy Update as the "state agency"--as the entity in the state that is responsible for administering and supervising adult education and literacy policy. In most states, it is either the state department of education or the community college system. (for information on the eligible agency in your state, see the Directory of National and State Literacy Contacts, available at www.nifl.gov or by calling 1-800-228-8813.)

2. For Information on how to contact the director of adult education in your state, see the Directory of National and State Literacy Contacts, available at www.nifl.gov or by calling 1-800-228-8813.

For more information, contact Alice Johnson at 202-632-1500, extension 31.

Appendix D

Resources for the Facilitator to read before the Study Circle

CONTENTS:

All the materials listed below are from *The Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators (1998)* by the Study Circles Resource Center.

- ➢ Key Facilitation Skills
- ➢ Good Study Circle Facilitators
- ➢ Background Notes for Good Study Circle Facilitators
- ➢ The Importance of Neutrality
- ➢ Tips for Effective Discussion Facilitation
- ➢ Suggestions for Dealing with Typical Challenges
- ➢ Leading a Study Circle
- ➢ "Working on Common Cross-cultural Communication Challenges" by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner

◈ Key facilitation skills

- **Reflecting** – feeding back the content and feeling of the message.

  "Let me see if I'm hearing you correctly..."

- **Clarifying** – restating an idea or thought to make it more clear.

  "What I believe you are saying is..."

- **Summarizing** – stating concisely the main thoughts.

  "It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes..."

- **Shifting focus** – moving from one speaker or topic to another.

  "Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?"

  "We've been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?"

- **Using silence** – allowing time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

- **Using non-verbal and verbal signals** – combining body language and speech to communicate – for example, using eye contact to encourage or discourage behaviors in the group. Be aware of cultural differences.

  Neutrality is important here, so that we don't encourage some people more than others.

◇ Good study circle facilitators

- are neutral; the facilitator's opinions are not part of the discussion.

- help the group set its ground rules, and keep to them.

- help group members grapple with the content by asking probing questions.

- help group members identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

- bring in points of view that haven't been talked about.

- create opportunities for everyone to participate.

- focus and help to clarify the discussion.

- summarize key points in the discussion, or ask others to do so.

And

- are self-aware; good facilitators know their own strengths, weaknesses, "hooks," biases, and values.

- are able to put the group first.

- have a passion for group process with its never-ending variety.

- appreciate all kinds of people.

- are committed to democratic principles.

Background notes for "Good study circle facilitators"

Study circles require a facilitator who can help focus and structure the discussion and, at the same time, encourage group ownership. The facilitator's main task is to create an atmosphere for democratic deliberation, one in which each participant feels at ease in expressing ideas and responding to those of others.

The study circle facilitator does not "teach" but instead is there to guide the group's process. He or she does not have to be an expert in the subject being discussed, but must know enough about it to be able to ask probing questions and raise views that have not been considered by the group.

Above all, staying neutral and helping the group to do its own work are central to good study circle facilitation. This takes practice and attention to one's own behaviors. Make sure to ask for the group's help in making this work well for everyone. ♢

◇ The importance of neutrality*

- Act as if you are neutral; *practice* neutrality.

- Encourage and affirm each person.

- Explain your role.

- Be aware of your own "unconscious" behaviors.

- Resist the temptation to step out of the role of facilitator.

*Thanks to the RKI *Facilitators' Working Guide*; see reference section.

Tips for effective discussion facilitation

Be prepared.

The facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed, but should be the best prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the subject, being familiar with the discussion materials, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparing questions to help further the discussion.

Set a relaxed and open tone.

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- Well-placed humor is always welcome, and helps to build the group's connections.

Establish clear ground rules.

At the beginning of the study circle, help the group establish its own ground rules by asking the participants to suggest ways for the group to behave. Here are some ground rules that are tried and true:

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Share "air time."
- Conflict is not personalized. Don't label, stereotype, or call people names.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- What is said in this group stays here, unless everyone agrees to change that.

Monitor and assist the group process.

- Keep track of how the group members are participating – who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points haven't been heard.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups to examine a variety of viewpoints or to give people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.
- When deciding whether to intervene, lean toward non-intervention.
- Don't talk after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other.
- Allow time for pauses and silence. People need time to reflect and respond.
- Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone.
- Remember: a study circle is not a debate, but a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.

◆ Tips for effective discussion facilitation (continued)

## Help the group grapple with the content.

- Make sure the group considers a wide range of views. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs and the opinions of others.
- Help the discussion along by clarifying, paraphrasing, and summarizing the discussion.
- Help participants to identify "common ground," but don't try to force consensus.

Use probing comments and open-ended questions which don't lead to yes or no answers. This will result in a more productive discussion. Some useful questions include:

- What seems to be the key point here?
- What is the crux of your disagreement?
- What would you say to support (or challenge) that point?
- Please give an example or describe a personal experience to illustrate that point.
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a person to support that point of view?
- What do you think people who hold that opinion care deeply about?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What do you find most persuasive about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?
- What information supports that point of view?

Reserve adequate time for closing the discussion.

- Ask the group for last comments and thoughts about the subject.
- Thank everyone for their contributions.
- Provide some time for the group to evaluate the study circle process.
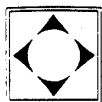
◈ Suggestions for dealing with typical challenges

Most study circles go smoothly because participants are there voluntarily and have a stake in the program. But there are challenges in any group process. What follows are some of the most common difficulties that study circle leaders encounter, along with some possible ways to deal with those difficulties.

Problem:
Certain participants don't say anything, seem shy.

Possible responses: Try to draw out quiet participants, but don't put them on the spot. Make eye contact – it reminds them that you'd like to hear from them. Look for nonverbal cues that indicate participants are ready to speak. Frequently, people will feel more comfortable in later sessions of a study circle program and will begin to participate. When someone comes forward with a brief comment after staying in the background for most of the study circle, you can encourage him or her by conveying genuine interest and asking for more information. And it's always helpful to talk with people informally before and after the session.
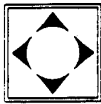
Problem:
An aggressive or talkative person dominates the discussion.

Possible responses: As the facilitator, it is your responsibility to handle domineering participants. Once it becomes clear what this person is doing, you *must* intervene and set limits. Start by limiting your eye contact with the speaker. Remind the group that everyone is invited to participate; "Let's hear from some folks who haven't had a chance to speak yet." If necessary, you can speak to the person by name. "Charlie, we've heard from you; now let's hear what Barbara has to say." Be careful to manage your comments and tone of voice – you are trying to make a point without offending the speaker.

Problem:
Lack of focus, not moving forward, participants wander off the topic.

Possible responses: Responding to this takes judgment and intuition. It is the facilitator's role to help move the discussion along. But it is not always clear which way it is going. Keep an eye on the participants to see how engaged they are, and if you are in doubt, check it out with the group. "We're a little off the topic right now. Would you like to stay with this, or move on to the next question?" If a participant goes into a lengthy digression, you may have to say: "We are wandering off the subject, and I'd like to give others a chance to speak."

◆ Suggestions for dealing with typical challenges (continued)

Problem:
Someone puts forth information which you know to be false. Or, participants get hung up in a dispute about facts but no one present knows the answer.

Possible responses: Ask, "Has anyone heard of conflicting information?" If no one offers a correction, offer one yourself. And if no one knows the facts, and the point is not essential, put it aside and move on. If the point is central to the discussion, encourage members to look up the information before the next meeting. Remind the group that experts often disagree.

Problem:
Lack of interest, no excitement, no one wants to talk, only a few people participating.

Possible responses: This rarely happens in study circles, but it may occur if the facilitator talks too much or does not give participants enough time to respond to questions. People need time to think, reflect, and get ready to speak up. It may help to pose a question and go around the circle until everyone has a chance to respond. Occasionally, you might have a lack of excitement in the discussion because the group seems to be in agreement and isn't coming to grips with the tensions inherent in the issue. In this case, the leader's job is to try to bring other views into the discussion, especially if no one in the group holds them. "Do you know people who hold other views? What would they say about our conversation?"

Problem:
Tension or open conflict in the group. Perhaps two participants lock horns and argue. Or, one participant gets angry and confronts another.

Possible responses: If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that disagreement and conflict of ideas is what a study circle is all about. Explain that, for conflict to be productive, it must be focused on the issue: it is acceptable to challenge someone's ideas, but personal attacks are not acceptable. You must interrupt personal attacks, name-calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur. You will be better able to do so if you have established ground rules that disallow such behaviors and that encourage tolerance for all views. Don't hesitate to appeal to the group for help; if group members bought into the ground rules, they will support you. As a last resort, consider taking a break to change the energy in the room. You can take the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the participants in question.
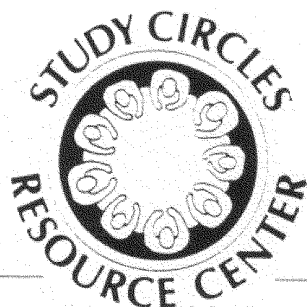
RESOURCE BRIEF

Leading a Study Circle

Once a study circle is underway, the study circle leader is the most important person in terms of its success or failure. The leader guides the group toward reaching the goals that have been set by the organizer and the participants. It is the leader's responsibility to stimulate and moderate the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process. While doing all this, the leader must be friendly, understanding, and supportive.

The leader does not need to be an expert or even the most knowledgeable person in the group. However, the leader should be the most well-prepared person in the room. This means thorough familiarity with the reading material,

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Encourage interaction among the group. Participants should be conversing with each other, not just with the leader.

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preparation of questions to aid discussion, previous reflection about the directions in which the discussion might go, knowledge of the people and personalities in the group, and a clear understanding of the goals of the study circle.

The most difficult aspects of leading discussion groups include keeping discussion focused, handling aggressive participants, and keeping one's own ego at bay in order to listen to and truly hear participants. A background of leading small group discussion or meetings is helpful. The following suggestions and principles of group leadership will be useful even for experienced leaders.

Beginning

• **"Beginning is half," says an old Chinese proverb.** Set a friendly and relaxed atmosphere from the start. The goals of the study circle should be discussed and perhaps modified in the first session, as should the ground rules for discussion. It is important that participants "buy in" right from the beginning.

• **Start each session with a brief review of the readings.** This is best done by a participant and will refresh the memories of those who read the session's material and include those who did not. Recapitulation of the main points will also provide a framework for the discussion.

Managing the Discussion

• **Keep discussion focused on the session's topic.** Straying too far could cause each session to lose its unique value. A delicate balance is best: don't force the group to stick to the topic too rigidly, but don't allow the discussion to drift. Most people do not regard a "bull session" as a valuable use of their time.

• **Do not allow the aggressive, talkative person or faction to dominate.** Doing so is a sure recipe for failure. One of the most difficult aspects of leading is restraining domineering participants. Don't let people call out and gain

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control of the floor. If you allow this to happen the aggressive will dominate, you may lose control, and the more polite people will become angry and frustrated.

• **Draw out quiet participants.** Do not allow anyone to sit quietly in the corner or to be forgotten by the group. Create an opportunity for each participant to contribute. The more you know about each person in the group, the easier this will be.

• **Be an active listener.** You will need to truly hear and understand what people say if you are to guide the discussion effectively. Listening carefully will set a good example for participants and will alert you to potential conflicts.

• **Stay neutral and be cautious about expressing your own values.** As the leader, you have considerable power with the group. That power should be used only for the purpose of furthering the discussion and not for establishing the correctness of a particular viewpoint. If you throw your weight behind the ideas of one faction in the study circle, your effectiveness in managing the discussion will be diminished.

• **Use conflict productively and don't allow participants to personalize their disagreements.** Do not avoid conflict, but try to keep it narrowly focused on the issue at hand. Since everyone's opinion is important in a study circle, participants should feel comfortable saying what they really think – even if it's unpopular.

• **Don't be afraid of pauses and silences.** People need time to think and reflect. Sometimes silence will help someone build up the courage to make a valuable point. Leaders who tend to be impatient may find it helpful to count silently to 10 after asking a question.

• **Do not allow the group to make you the expert or "answer person."** The point of a study circle is not to come up with an answer, but for the participants to share their concerns and develop their understanding. Don't set yourself up as the final arbiter. Let the group decide what it believes and correct itself when a mistake is made.

• **Don't always be the one to respond to comments and questions.** Encourage interaction among the group. Participants should be conversing with each other, not just with the leader. Often questions or comments are directed at the leader, but they can be deflected to another member of the group.

• **Synthesize or summarize the discussion occasionally.** It is helpful to consolidate related ideas to provide a solid base for the discussion to build upon.

Using Questions Effectively

• **Ask hard questions.** Don't allow the discussion to simply confirm old assumptions. Avoid following any "line," and encourage participants to re-examine their assumptions. Call attention to points that have not been mentioned or seriously considered, whether you agree with them or not.

• **Utilize open-ended questions.** Questions such as, "What other possibilities have we not yet considered?" do not lend themselves to short, specific answers and are especially helpful for drawing out quiet members of the group.

Concluding

• **Don't worry about attaining consensus.** It's good for the study circle to have a sense of where participants stand, but it's not necessary to achieve consensus. In some cases a group will be split, and there's no need to hammer out agreement.

• **Close each session with a summary and perhaps an evaluation.** Remind participants of the overall goals of the program and ask them whether the discussion helped the group to move toward those goals. You will definitely want evaluations from the group at the midpoint of the course and at the final session.

Excerpted from a 32-page pamphlet, "Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle." Write or call for more information on the Study Circles Resource Center, its services, and its other publications.

APPENDIX

Working on Common Cross-cultural Communication Challenges
by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner

Ed. Note: This article first appeared in SCRC's publication, "Toward a More Perfect Union in an Age of Diversity." Because of the increasing cultural diversity in all communities across the United States, we include it here as good background for any study circle facilitator.

We all have an internal list of those we still don't understand, let alone appreciate. We all have biases, even prejudices, toward specific groups. In our workshops we ask people to gather in pairs and think about their hopes and fears in relating to people of a group different from their own. Fears usually include being judged, miscommunication, and patronizing or hurting others unintentionally; hopes are usually the possibility of dialogue, learning something new, developing friendships, and understanding different points of view. After doing this activity hundreds of times, I'm always amazed how similar the lists are. At any moment that we're dealing with people different from ourselves, the likelihood is that they carry a similar list of hopes and fears in their back pocket. – From Waging Peace in Our Schools, *by Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti, Beacon Press, 1996*

We all communicate with others all the time – in our homes, in our workplaces, in the groups we belong to, and in the community. No matter how well we think we understand each other, communication is hard. Just think, for example, how often we hear things like, "He doesn't get it," or "She didn't really hear what I meant to say."

"Culture" is often at the root of communication challenges. Our culture influences how we approach problems, and how we participate in groups and in communities. When we participate in groups we are often surprised at how differently people approach their work together.

Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. But, simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender, race, or national origin. It also includes groups we join or become part of. For example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly, we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.

Our histories are a critical piece of our cultures. Historical experiences – whether of five years ago or of ten generations back – shape who we are. Knowledge of our history can help us understand ourselves and one another better. Exploring the ways in which various groups within our society have related to each other is key to opening channels for cross-cultural communication.

Six fundamental patterns of cultural differences

In a world as complex as ours, each of us is shaped by many factors, and culture is one of the powerful forces that acts on us. Anthropologists Kevin Avruch and Peter Black explain the

importance of culture this way: "...One's own culture provides the 'lens' through which we view the world; the 'logic'... by which we order it; the 'grammar' ... by which it makes sense." In other words, culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves.

As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. We can misunderstand each other, and react in ways that can hinder what are otherwise promising partnerships. Oftentimes, we aren't aware that culture is acting upon us. Sometimes, we are not even aware that we have cultural values or assumptions that are different from others'!

Six fundamental patterns of cultural differences – ways in which cultures, as a whole, tend to vary from one another – are described below. The descriptions point out some of the recurring causes of cross-cultural communication difficulties. As you enter into multicultural dialogue or collaboration, keep these generalized differences in mind. Next time you find yourself in a confusing situation, and you suspect that cross-cultural differences are at play, try reviewing this list. Ask yourself how culture may be shaping your own reactions, and try to see the world from others' points of view.

1. Different Communication Styles

The way people communicate varies widely between, and even within, cultures. One aspect of communication style is language usage. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in different ways. For example, even in countries that share the English language, the meaning of "yes" varies from "maybe, I'll consider it" to "definitely so," with many shades in between.

Another major aspect of communication style is the degree of importance given to non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication includes not only facial expressions and gestures; it also involves seating arrangements, personal distance, and sense of time. In addition, different norms regarding the appropriate degree of assertiveness in communicating can add to cultural misunderstandings. For instance, some white Americans typically consider raised voices to be a sign that a fight has begun, while some black, Jewish and Italian Americans often feel that an increase in volume is a sign of an exciting conversation among friends. Thus, some white Americans may react with greater alarm to a loud discussion than would members of some American ethnic or non-white racial groups.

2. Different Attitudes Toward Conflict

Some cultures view conflict as a positive thing, while others view it as something to be avoided. In the U.S., conflict is not usually desirable; but people often are encouraged to deal directly with conflicts that do arise. In fact, face-to-face meetings customarily are recommended as the way to work through whatever problems exist. In contrast, in many Eastern countries, open conflict is experienced as embarrassing or demeaning; as a rule, differences are best worked out quietly. A written exchange might be the favored means to address the conflict.

3. Different Approaches to Completing Tasks

From culture to culture, there are different ways that people move toward completing tasks. Some reasons include different access to resources, different judgments of the rewards associated with task completion, different notions of time, and varied ideas about how relationship building and task-oriented work should go together.

When it comes to working together effectively on a task, cultures differ with respect to importance placed on establishing relationships early on in the collaboration. A case in poir and Hispanic cultures tend to attach more value to developing relationships at the beginnin shared project and more emphasis on task completion toward the end as compared with Eur Americans. European-Americans tend to focus immediately on the task at hand, and let rela develop as they work on the task. This does not mean that people from any one of these cul backgrounds are more or less committed to accomplishing the task, or value relationships mo it means they may pursue them differently.

4. Different Decision-Making Styles

The roles individuals play in decision-making vary widely from culture to culture. For ex: the U.S., decisions are frequently delegated – that is, an official assigns responsibility for a pa matter to a subordinate. In many Southern European and Latin American countries, there is value placed on holding decision-making responsibilities oneself. When decisions are made b of people, majority rule is a common approach in the U.S.; in Japan consensus is the preferre Be aware that individuals' expectations about their own roles in shaping a decision may be ir by their cultural frame of reference.

5. Different Attitudes Toward Disclosure

In some cultures, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, about the reasons behi conflict or a misunderstanding, or about personal information. Keep this in mind when you a dialogue or when you are working with others. When you are dealing with a conflict, be min people may differ in what they feel comfortable revealing. Questions that may seem natural t What was the conflict about? What was your role in the conflict? What was the sequence of may seem intrusive to others. The variation among cultures in attitudes toward disclosure is a something to consider before you conclude that you have an accurate reading of the views, experiences, and goals of the people with whom you are working.

6. Different Approaches to Knowing

Notable differences occur among cultural groups when it comes to epistemologies – that i ways people come to know things. European cultures tend to consider information acquired tl cognitive means, such as counting and measuring, more valid than other ways of coming to k things. Compare that to African cultures' preference for affective ways of knowing – that is, knowledge that comes from the experience of something – including symbolic imagery and rh Asian cultures' epistemologies tend to emphasize the validity of knowledge gained through str toward transcendence.

Here, in the U.S., with all our cultural mixing and sharing, we can't apply these generaliz: whole groups of people. But we can use them to recognize that there is more than one way to the world and to learn. Recent popular works demonstrate that our own society is paying mor attention to previously overlooked ways of knowing. Indeed, these different approaches to kn could affect ways of analyzing a community problem or finding ways to resolve it. Some memt your group may want to do library research to understand a shared problem better and identify solutions. Others may prefer to visit places and people who have experienced challenges like t you are facing, and get a feeling for what has worked elsewhere.

Respecting our differences and working together

In addition to helping us to understand ourselves and our own cultural frames of reference, knowledge of these six patterns of cultural difference can help us to understand the people who are different from us. An appreciation of patterns of cultural difference can assist us in processing what it means to be different in ways that are respectful of others, not faultfinding or damaging.

Anthropologists Avruch and Black have noted that, when faced by an interaction that we do not understand, people tend to interpret the others involved as "abnormal," "weird," or "wrong". This tendency, if indulged, gives rise on the individual level to prejudice. If this propensity is either consciously or unconsciously integrated into organizational structures, then prejudice takes root in our institutions – in the structures, laws, policies, and procedures that shape our lives. Consequently, it is vital that we learn to control the human tendency to translate "different from me" into "less than me." We can learn to do this.

We can also learn to collaborate across cultural lines as individuals and as a society. Awareness of cultural differences doesn't have to divide us from each other. It doesn't have to paralyze us either, for fear of not saying the "right thing." In fact, becoming more aware of our cultural differences, as well as exploring our similarities, can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

Learning about different ways that people communicate can enrich our lives. People's different communication styles reflect deeper philosophies and world views which are the foundation of their culture. Understanding these deeper philosophies gives us a broader picture of what the world has to offer us.

Learning about people's cultures has the potential to give us a mirror image of our own. We have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about the "right" way of doing things, and consider a variety of approaches. We have a chance to learn new ways to solve problems that we had previously given up on, accepting the difficulties as "just the way things are."

Lastly, if we are open to learning about people from other cultures, we become less lonely. Prejudice and stereotypes separate us from whole groups of people who could be friends and partners in working for change. Many of us long for real contact. Talking with people different from ourselves gives us hope and energizes us to take on the challenge of improving our communities and worlds.

Cultural questions – about who we are and how we identify ourselves – are at the heart of [study circles], and will be at the heart of your discussions. As you set to work on multicultural collaboration in your community, keep in mind these additional guidelines:

- Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, "write off," or oversimplify your ideas about another person. The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multifaceted human beings.

- Practice, practice, practice. That's the first rule, because it's in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.

- Don't assume that there is one right way (yours!) to communicate. Keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate. For example, think about your body language; postures that indicate receptivity in one culture might indicate aggressiveness in another.

- Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track. Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown.

- Listen actively and empathetically. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Especially when another person's perceptions or ideas are very different from your own, you might need to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.

- Respect others' choices about whether to engage in communication with you. Honor their opinions about what is going on.

- Stop, suspend judgment, and try to look at the situation as an outsider.

- Be prepared for a discussion of the past. Use this as an opportunity to develop an understanding from "the other's" point of view, rather than getting defensive or impatient. Acknowledge historical events that have taken place. Be open to learning more about them. Honest acknowledgment of the mistreatment and oppression that have taken place on the basis of cultural difference is vital for effective communication.

- Awareness of current power imbalances — and an openness to hearing each other's perceptions of those imbalances — is also necessary for understanding each other and working together.

- Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual. We are all shaped by many, many factors — our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities — and are more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest. Check your interpretations if you are uncertain what is meant. ✧

Marcelle E. DuPraw is a former Program Director at the National Institute for Dispute Resolution in Washington, DC. Marya Axner is a consultant in leadership development, cross-cultural communication, and gender equity. She can be reached at (617) 776-7411.

i   Avruch, Kevin and Peter Black, " Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Settings: Problems and Prospects," in Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application, edited by Dennis Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe. New York: St. Marti's Press, 1993.

ii This list and some of the explanatory text is drawn from DuPraw and Warfield (1991), and informally published workshop manual co-authored by one of the authors of this piece.

iii Nichols, Edwin J., a presentation made to the World Psychiatric Association and Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria, November 10, 1976.

iv For example, for research on women's approaches to knowledge, se Lorraine Code, What Can She Know?: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge Ithaca: Cornell, 1991; M.F. Belenky, N.R. Goldberger, & J.M. Tarule, Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of the Self, Voice and Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1986; Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1982.

v   Avruch and Black, 1993.

Appendix E

To be sent to NCSALL after conclusion of the Study Circle

CONTENTS:
- Feedback Form

Performance appraisal for Study Circle facilitators
Feedback for NCSALL

Group name: _____

Location/site of your study circle: _____

1. When did your study circle meet?

    Day: _____   Time: _____

2. How many times did your Study Circle meet?

3. Generally speaking, how satisfied have you been with your experience as a Study Circle facilitator?
- ❑ Very satisfied
- ❑ Somewhat satisfied
- ❑ Not at all satisfied
   Why?

4. What was your most satisfying experience as a facilitator? Please provide an example:

5. What was your most frustrating experience as a Study Circle facilitator? Please provide an example:

6. In all , how many people participated in your study circle? (Count everyone who attended at least one session.) _____

    6a) How many people started with the first session? _____

    6b) How many of those people attended all the sessions? _____

    6c)How many people attended only one or two sessions? _____

7. How satisfied were your participants with the study circle process?
- ❑ Most participants seemed satisfied
- ❑ Most participants expressed dissatisfaction
- ❑ Most participants expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction at various points in the process
- ❑ I couldn't judge their levels of satisfaction
Please explain:

Return to NCSALL at: 44 Farnsworth St, Boston MA 02210. Att: Cristine Smith
Adapted from Study Circle Resource Center feedback form

8. Did you have adequate support from the program organizers?
❑ Yes
❑ No
❑ Not sure
Please explain:

9. What additional support would have been helpful?

10. If you were to facilitate another Study Circle, what factors would you change (for example – discussion materials, activities)?

11. What difference has taking part in this Study Circle program made in you personally?

12. What difference do you see this Study Circle program making in your program or state?

13. Other impressions, concerns, and comments:

Your name: (optional)

_____

Return to NCSALL at: 44 Farnsworth St, Boston MA 02210. Att: Cristine Smith
Adapted from Study Circle Resource Center feedback form