Appendix D

To be handed out at
Session Two of the Study Circle

Session Two Materials

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Handout G

Real Life? Authentic? Contextualized?

Research including that by NCSALL researcher Victoria Purcell-Gates and her colleagues indicates that using real-life materials or contexutalized instruction in adult education classes leads to increased literacy practices by students outside class. But when adult educators talk about using real-life contexts in their work, they are interpreting "real-life" in a variety of ways. What is contextualized teaching and learning? What do we mean by "real-life"?

At one end of the continuum is teaching and learning that is based around real-life needs of a particular student or group of students and uses texts that come from those students' lives, what Jacobson, et al. refer to as **using authentic materials for authentic purposes.** "We mean print materials used in ways that they would be used in the lives of learners outside their adult education classes."[1]

Marilyn Gillespie describes the EFF contextualized approach to curriculum and instruction: "EFF teachers start with real-life contexts and weave these contexts into every stage of the teaching and learning process. Instruction and assessment are **aimed directly at the skills and knowledge adults need to perform tasks they have identified as meaningful to them "right now" in their everyday lives**." [2] The materials and activities may or may not all be "authentic" as defined by Jacobson, but the overall purpose of teaching and learning addresses the real-life needs identified by particular students.

The teacher or program or a credential like the GED may determine the basic skills that are to be learned, but teaching and learning of those skills draws from real-life examples. Instruction **may use real-life materials, but the purposes are not determined by the students.**

A teacher may create simulations or problems for students to solve as learning activities for particular skills. Students are using **real materials but not addressing actual problems in their lives**.

Teaching and learning may use real-life materials to teach real-life skills or competencies, but the **materials are not from the lives of these particular students and the skills may not be those needed by those students**, e.g. a teacher uses real checks and deposit slips with a student who does not have or want a checking account.

Teachers may use examples from contexts to illustrate how an academic skill could be applied in real life, but **students do not actually apply the skills in contexts real to their lives as part of teaching and learning**.

Teachers may **address real-life or functional skills but use published workbooks** as teaching materials.

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[1] Jacobson, E., Degener, S., Purcell-Gates, V. (2003) Creaing authentic materials and activitites for the adult literacy classroom. NCSALL Teaching and Training Materials
[2] Gillespie, M. (2002) EFF research principle: A contextualized approach to curriculum and instruction. National Institute for Literacy.

At the other end of the continuum is use of **published instructional materials that include text that use examples based on "real" life** to teach reading, writing, language or math skills. So a teacher may say she is including real-life contexts when the workbook she uses includes sections on paying bills or reading a bus schedule. But the activities, e.g., answering multiple choice questions, are not found outside the classroom and the materials are created for the purpose of teaching and learning skills.

WHAT WORKS STUDY FOR ADULT ESL STUDENTS

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The *What Works* Study for Adult ESL Students has examined the question:

> *What instructional activities and program components help ESL literacy students acquire English literacy skills?*

The study used a naturalistic research design. On-site data collectors worked in 38 classes in 13 programs across the country over a two-year period. They made bi-weekly observations in classes to identify and code instructional activities, and they assessed 495 students three times – at intake, after three months and after nine months, whether or not they were still attending class. The student assessment instruments included standardized reading, speaking, and writing tests; an interview on literacy practices; a reading demonstration and teacher observations.

This study found a variety of instructional emphases and examined a variety of instructional practices. A final report (not yet published) will describe the study and the findings in detail. Many factors were related to three outcomes: growth in reading basic skills, growth in reading comprehension, and growth in oral English language development. In summary, these were:

Growth in reading basic skills
- Connection to the outside instructional strategy
- Basic literacy skills instructional emphasis
- Shorter classes, measured by total hours offered
- Younger students
- Years of formal education (proxy for native language literacy), but less important over time
- English oral proficiency at entry into class (BEST score)

Growth in reading comprehension
- Teachers' use of students' native language in instruction
- Rate of attendance
- Basic reading skills at entry into class

Growth in oral English development
- Rate of attendance
- Longer classes
- Varied practice and feedback instructional strategy
- Oral language instructional emphasis
- Younger students
- Basic reading skills at entry into class.

Of particular relevance to this Study Circle was the factor "Connection to the outside." The characteristic strategies and practices of this factor included teachers linking what was being learned in the classroom to life outside the classroom and bringing the "outside" into the classroom through authentic materials, guest speakers, and field trips. Students had the opportunity to make the connection between school-type tasks and the challenges they face outside the classroom.

The study found that students in classes where the teacher made a connection to the outside had significantly stronger growth in basic reading skills than did students in classes where this factor was not as strongly in evidence.

Planning Form

Current Instructional Strategies	Ideas for Making Instruction More Contextualized
Math	
Reading	
Writing	