

Exploring, understanding and  
harnessing existing **adult writing  
groups** (on and offline) **as spaces for  
adult literacy development**

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# Researching adult reading circles:

- Research 2007-2014
- Historical research
- Existing everyday groups
- Qualitative research with a group in an adult literacy class

# Learning from reading circles....

- Are centred around a written text
- Involve reading
- Are non-hierarchical
- Involve turn-taking
- Are collaborative
- Involve peer teaching and learning
- Involve ***discussion***

# Gains reported:

- Social
- Exploring together, understanding what's going on, together
- Compassion
- Vocabulary
- Discussion skills/confidence
- Decoding words
- Feeling like I can read and understand a book
- Spelling
- Building words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs and chapters..
- Writing- notes and sentences
- Punctuation
- Confidence working in a group, negotiating etc

# Reading circles as 'Ideal pedagogy'?

- Peer-teaching
- Negotiated Syllabi
- Participant-led differentiation
- L1 and L2 needs
- Working together, support and 'citizenship'
- Practices as pedagogies (communities of practice, situated learning...)
- See [Reading the Way](#)

Duncan, S. (2014). *Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers*. Leicester: NIACE.

<http://readinggroups.org/news/reading-groups-read>

<http://readinggroups.org/resources/1374>

Duncan, S. (2012). *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development*. London: Continuum.

Long, E. (2003). *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

What do we know about *adult writing groups*?

# *Writing Groups: History, Theory and Implications* by Anne Ruggles Gere (1987)

- Traces (within a US context, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century) writing groups inside and outside of academic institutions, within and in place of formal educational opportunities
- Self-improvement groups/movements: “Early Americans had an unusually strong tendency to gather together on issues of mutual concern.” (p. 33)
- Includes groups for those excluded from other opportunities
- Links to theories of collaborative/social learning, and political ideals



# What do we know about adults who might want to improve their writing?

- Adult lives and varied desires/hopes/'needs'
- Confidences, social hierarchies and language variety
- Working life and life beyond work
- Using a 'word, sentence and text level' framework: spelling, punctuation, sentence boundaries, paragraphing, genre conventions, vocabulary and context, relevance and expressing meaning to help the reader (and uses of technology)
- The helpfulness of impetus, time, encouragement, 'permission', validation, feedback, opportunities to give others feedback and practice

# Jane Mace

**1979, *Working with Words: Literacy beyond school***

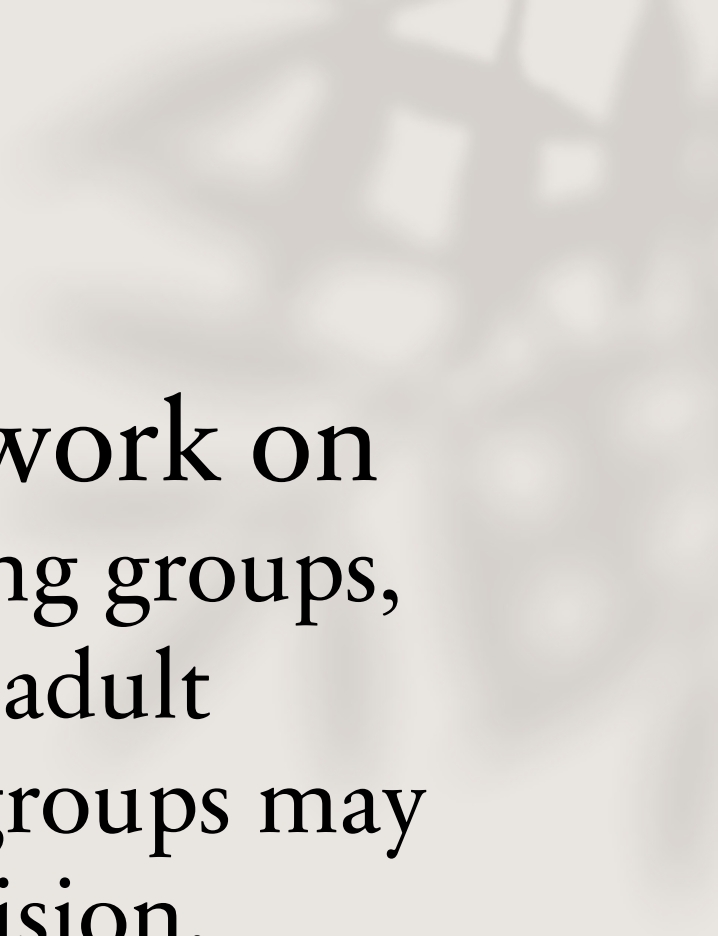
*“The lie common to a large amount of press coverage is that literacy students are a special race of people about whom the ‘literate’ have expert opinions” (p.20)*

Mace examines the issue of **representation** that she returns to throughout her career. How can those who are not adult literacy students themselves talk and write about those who are? And how do literacy students talk and write about literacy and literacy education? How might we all be mis-representing, misunderstanding, mis-recognizing and missing opportunities?

**Adult literacy workshops and student writing events**

## ***1992, Talking about Literacy: Principles & Practice of Adult Literacy Education***

- Part 1 returns to the ‘problems of representation,’ including how adult literacy students represent their relationships with literacy, how literacy practitioners represent literacy education, how campaigners and policy makers represent ‘the problem of illiteracy’ and how everyone deals with the great challenge of representing (and understanding) the experiences of others.
- Part 2 of this book develops what Mace presents as the five key principles of adult literacy education: **context, inquiry, authorship, equality and community**.
- Crucially, **authorship** is at the center of all five principles (a point of overlap), just as it is one answer to the ‘problem of representation’ (and, perhaps, to ‘measuring the journey’).



The reading circle model, existing work on writing groups, what we know about writing groups, and collaborative, democratic traditions of adult literacy education all suggest that writing groups may have something to offer adult literacy provision.

# And so – what next?

- A research project or projects
- Development projects (*including thinking about what is sustainable and yet has an impact*)
- Would you like to get involved?

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# Policy implications:

- Worth examining as part of an effort to find more sustainable and more democratic models for adult literacy development