

BOOK REVIEW



*Reviewed by
Amani Talwar*

Georgia State University

Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers: Insights in Adult Learning

By Sam Duncan

2014; National Institute for Adult Continuing Education,
Leicester, England
76 pages, paperback, \$19.95

Sam Duncan's *Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers* is both comprehensive and accessible. Duncan covers several topics relating to starting and running reading groups. This information will certainly be useful for her intended primary audience of reading circle facilitators and adult literacy teachers. Since this text was clearly written with various literacy levels in mind, adult learners interested in the material will also find this a readable guide.

Accessibility is a prominent feature throughout the book. The large font and generous use of subheadings make each chapter "reader friendly." The vocabulary and sentence structure are generally simple. Special terms such as *emergent readers*, *reading for pleasure*, and *negotiated syllabus* are defined and discussed. Italics are used for emphasis within blocks of text, so that the reader knows to pay attention to important information. A glance at the index demonstrates the effectiveness of Duncan's chapter titles and subheadings. The chapter titles are concise and descriptive, and the subheadings serve as good summaries of the corresponding sections. For example, in the chapter "Background Theory," there is a section titled "Reading for Pleasure" with the following lower-level subheadings: "What is reading for pleasure?" "What do we read for pleasure?" and "How do we read for pleasure?"

A winning feature in the first two chapters is boxes titled “inspirations,” which contain snippets of how some individuals throughout history learned to read.

Duncan summarizes findings about reading circles from qualitative research and highlights the potential learning outcomes of participating in such groups.

These organizational strategies make this book a useful guide for both types of reading circles that Duncan discusses: those run by an outside facilitator and those run by the members themselves.

The content of the book encompasses three main topics: basic terminology and research, practical knowledge for reading circle facilitation, and case studies of reading circle members. First, Duncan defines and discusses reading for pleasure, reading circles, and why people might want to engage in both practices. This material serves to familiarize readers with the language and direction of the book. A winning feature in the first two chapters are boxes titled “inspirations,” which contain snippets of how some individuals throughout history learned to read and first-person statements about why people read. These boxes explicitly connect the content of this book to everyday life and ensure that less proficient readers do not feel alienated.

Second, Duncan provides useful information for individuals looking to facilitate reading circles. Topics covered include organizing the first group meeting, models of reading circles, facilitators’ roles, readers’ goals, selecting texts, maintaining reader interest, and measuring the impact of the reading circle. This comprehensive discussion also covers research, especially in the fourth chapter “Teaching and Learning.” Here, Duncan summarizes findings about reading circles from qualitative research and highlights the potential learning outcomes of participating in such groups. Researchers and practitioners who desire to learn more about the effectiveness of reading circles will find this chapter particularly insightful.

Third, Duncan presents two case studies of individuals who have participated in reading circles. After taking her children to reading events at her local library, Anna joined a reading circle because she did not finish school and wanted to improve her reading. She discovered that she loves immersing herself in the plot and characters of a novel. She believes that the reading circles have increased her confidence in reading and discussing. Tom mainly works manual jobs that do not involve reading, so he joined a reading circle recommended by a librarian to get more reading practice. He found that he enjoys historical books and biographies. He especially likes the discussion aspect of reading circles, which allows him to consider other people’s ideas. Clearly, Anna and Tom differ in their backgrounds, preferences, and motivations, which reiterates the diversity of readers’ goals that Duncan discusses elsewhere in the book. These case studies provide real-world examples of people who have joined and benefitted from reading circles, which will be encouraging to adult learners considering reading circles.

Reading circles do not have to be limited to communities with well-established adult literacy support. Duncan presents a variety of resources to start and support reading circles, including children's schools, faith communities, and other local groups, which may be more accessible than libraries and adult education centers in some areas of the world. This guide's relevance for various parts of the world is a major strength.

Duncan ensures that there is something for everyone in this book. By highlighting the diversity of reading circles, she reassures readers that such reading groups can accommodate their particular needs and interests. Her in-depth and accessible guidance on starting and running reading circles will be useful to prospective facilitators at various reading levels. Her review of the learning outcomes of reading circles will especially appeal to researchers and practitioners. Finally, her case studies will demonstrate to readers of all backgrounds how reading circles have positively impacted the literacy skills and self-efficacy of real individuals.

Duncan presents a variety of resources to start and support reading circles, including children's schools, faith communities, and other local groups.

Amani Talwar is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology at Georgia State University and is a graduate research assistant at the IES-funded Center for the Study of Adult Literacy. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and Education from Mount Holyoke College and a M.S. in Educational Psychology from Georgia State University.