



## **Suggestions for Book Clubs or Study Groups**

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### **Effective Staff Development**

A good way to engage people in their own professional growth is to organize a book study group. At some schools, every teacher is asked to read the same book and work in small groups to discuss the book and its implications for practice. At other schools, teachers may choose from several books and join colleagues who selected the same book for their discussion.

Some schools use technology for book study groups. For example, at Brookings-Harbor High School in Oregon books study was a part of their annual professional development plan. Rather than meet in small groups on campus where one or two people might dominate the discussion, they used Moodle (<http://moodle.org>), open-source software that is free and readily available online. With Moodle it is possible to create small discussion groups using threaded discussions. Each member of the groups can make comments, and respond to the comments of others. They report that not only did participation increase but the quality of the discussion improved. One of the benefits is that teachers were able to participate any time of the day, at their convenience. That provided for more engaging and thoughtful discussion.

### Book Study Protocol

- ◆ Membership should be voluntary, but inclusive.
- ◆ Decide a meeting schedule, meeting place, length of book to be read, and what will happen after the book is read. It is recommended that meetings last no more than one hour and be held at a consistent time and place.
- ◆ Select a responsible facilitator to keep the group on task and help manage the meetings.
- ◆ Select a book with a clear objective in mind. For example, use *Rigor is not a Four Letter Word* with teachers to launch the conversation about rigor or use *Rigor and Assessment* with school leaders or your school improvement team.
- ◆ Conversation is important in a book study. Members of the group share insights, ask questions about the text, and learn from others. It is important to talk about how the ideas can be applied directly in the classroom and how to overcome any potential obstacles.
- ◆ Journaling is a useful way for members to think about their reading and reflect on how it might be used.

Through the application and reflection questions in the book and the suggestions provided below, you can incorporate hands-on activities for follow-up which will also allow for accountability through classroom use of the material. Finally, through the leadership of the faculty and administrators in your building, you will be able to tailor the material to the specific needs of your students, in order to maximize learning.

## General Suggestions

If you are a facilitator or a member of a book club or study group, many teachers may benefit from discussing ideas and concerns with each chapter. You may want to hold roundtable discussions after the chapters to help faculty build on one another's ideas. This will also help in establishing or implementing school-wide initiatives as each teacher will have input and ownership over the strategies discussed. At the end of each chapter, you'll find reflection questions to prompt your group discussions.

### Overall Guiding Questions and Activities

There are general questions and strategies for reflection that can be used throughout a discussion of the book. The activities below are divided into three sections: Pre-Reading Activities for teachers to complete prior to reading the book; During Reading Activities, which can be used anytime during the discussions; and After Reading Activities, to be completed after teachers have finished the book. The ideas are purposely more generic than the reflection and application questions in the book. Balance the use of these with the more specific suggestions to best meet the needs of your particular situation and/or group.



### *Pre-Reading Activities*

#### Sentence Starters

Write the following phrases on chart paper. Post them around the room and ask teachers to anonymously respond to each using Post-It notes. Group each set of notes by category, and use as a discussion starter.

- The percentage of my students who struggle with <insert either general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations> is...

- The biggest challenge to increasing <insert either general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations> for our struggling students is ...
- I wish ...

### Find the Solution!

On an index card, each person writes one of the biggest classroom or student challenges he or she is facing related to <insert either general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations>.

Fold each card and place it in a bowl. Each group member then chooses a challenge from the bowl. As

you progress through the chapters, look for solutions to those challenges. After reading the book in its entirety, everyone will share the index card challenge they drew, as well as the solutions they found in the book.



### Pipe Cleaner Responses

Each teacher uses a pipe cleaner to form a shape that represents the feelings your students have about <insert either general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations>. Ask each to share their shape with the group, and explain why they formed it.

### *During Reading Suggested Ideas*

#### Learning Walk

As you begin to implement some of the strategies, do a learning walk. Find other teachers who are willing, and visit each other's classrooms. Look for examples of <insert either general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations>. Discuss the positive examples you see.



### Write a Letter to a New Teacher

Choose 8-10 topics or words from the book. Ask teachers to write a letter to a first-year teacher using the terms you provide.

### My Head is Spinning!

For each teacher: Draw two heads: one smiling and one with a question mark. In the smiling head, write down ideas from each chapter that you connect with. In the one with a question mark, write questions you have from each chapter.

### Try It Out!

Each teacher shares one strategy or suggestion from each chapter and implement it into their classrooms or instruction. Then, they share what happened and what adjustments they will make.



### *After Reading Activities*

#### Author Interview

Working together, teacher write a list of interview questions or a letter for the author posing a series of questions about some of the ideas expressed in the book.

#### Sharing Our Successes

Have each teacher take a digital picture of the student work that resulted from one of the strategies suggested in the book. Then, ask the teacher to write what he or she learned from the activity. Create a webpage or bulletin board in the faculty workroom or to showcase student and teacher learning!



#### Blueprint for Improvement

Work together in small groups to create a blueprint or plan for <insert either

general topic such as rigor, or a specific topic such as expectations> in your school. Include the next steps and any needed tools or resources.



### **Frequently Asked Questions About Book Studies**

*How should we structure our book study?*

There are a variety of ways to structure a book study. Some schools have teachers work in small groups as they progress through the chapters. Other schools ask different teams, departments, or grade levels to present one chapter at a faculty meeting.

*How much time should we spend on each chapter?*

That also depends on your structure, and your school schedule. If you would like to work on a compressed schedule, you can do one chapter per week. I prefer to have more reflection time, so two weeks per chapter works as a minimum. I've also worked with schools that do one chapter a month.

*Who leads the book study? Is this an administrator's responsibility or should teachers lead?*

The choice of a leader depends on your situation. Ideally, you are looking for someone to facilitate discussion. That means they don't need to "teach" a book study session; they need to ask prompting questions and pull the group back together if

they get too far off-track. But we have worked with schools where the group dynamics required someone with a stronger, more direct approach. There are also times when an administrator leading the study is a critical part of instructional leadership. Ultimately, you must assess your situation to determine the best approach.

*We've tried a book study before and one or two of our teachers dominate the conversation. Often, they try to draw us off track into something else. How can I prevent this or at least lessen the impact?*



This can be a real problem in book study groups or any other collaborative work. There are two ways you can minimize the impact. First, you might use a pair-share strategy where you pair participants for the discussion. This would lessen the impact on the entire group. Second, you will also want the group to agree on other ground rules. They might include norms about how frequently a person can speak or use of a parking lot to capture the thoughts and ideas without impacting the conversation.

Notes: A thank you to Kendra Alston for her practical ideas, and to Ron Williamson for working with me to develop the structure for book studies.

For more information about Barbara's on-site or technology-based professional development, please contact her through her website,  
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