

Book Study Suggestions

Learning is inherently social. Though sometimes we feel isolated as teachers, most of us know the benefits of taking time to engage with colleagues. It is in these conversations or “teacher talk” as Regie Routman calls it, we find our own ideas clarified and enriched. This is particularly true when new ideas arise in education. While there are many ways to structure a study group, it is most important to foster a climate in which teachers feel free and safe to participate in the ongoing conversations and exchange of ideas. Other guidelines can make book study more productive. Here are a few things you might consider.

Watch Group Size: You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. Often the optimal number is 4 or 5 to ensure there is time for all to exchange ideas. The larger group can reassemble at the end to debrief.

Use Study Questions: Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- ✓ Put 3 or 4 questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- ✓ Create a chart with 2 or 3 starter questions and ask the group to generate more, tapping their own personal interests and needs.
- ✓ Decide on 3 or 4 questions and divide the group by interest in the various topics. This allows for a more in-depth study.
- ✓ Make copies of the suggested questions for everyone and invite discussion without deciding where to start.

Create an Agenda: Make sure you have planned a beginning and ending time and *always* honor those times. Teachers are busy and knowing there will be a time to start and a time to end is important.

Stay Focused on the Topic: Plan a procedure that is transparent. You might start by saying something like, “Let’s decide on a signal to use when we feel the discussion is drifting and then have everyone agree to help stay focused.”

Include Everyone: Keep groups small enough so that even the quietest member is encouraged to speak. Active listening on everyone’s part will help. Remember that periods of silence should be expected when people are thinking.

Share Leadership: Rotate group facilitation. Identify several “duties” for the facilitator. Examples might include a discussion format, suggesting a big idea from a chapter or group of chapters, and synthesizing or summarizing at the end. Remember that in a study group, *everyone* is a learner. This isn’t the place for an “expert!”

Create a List of Norms: Simple expectations that are transparent often make study groups function with greater ease and increase potential for success. These can be simple and might include ways to invite a tentative member into the conversation, expectations about listening, start and stop times, and a procedure for refocusing.

Set Dates for the Next Meeting: Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will facilitate.

Engage in Reflection: Stop from time-to-time to reflect on what you are learning and how you might make your group's interactions more productive.

Celebrate Learning: Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning.

The questions in each study guide usually relate to the content in each chapter and across chapters. There are of course suggestions and many more concepts and ideas within each chapter itself. Enjoy!