

How to Develop a Staff Book Study

Tips, strategies, and book titles to provide differentiated professional learning.

By Jessica Johnson

The book could focus on a specific curricular/instruction need for your building, such as:

- *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller;
- *Writing Pathways* by Lucy Calkins;
- *Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites* by Marcia Tate; or
- *Choice Words* by Peter Johnston.

Or maybe your staff would benefit from an inspiring read that can improve the culture, such as:

- *The Energy Bus* by Jon Gordon;
- *The No Complaining Rule* by Jon Gordon;
- *How Full is Your Bucket* by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton; or
- *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer.

According to renowned education professor Todd Whitaker, one thing that great principals do differently is take every opportunity to hire and retain the very best teachers. Principals not only have the responsibility of retaining those great teachers, but also of supporting all teachers in their growth to benefit student learning. It can certainly be a challenge for principals to plan meaningful professional development that will have a lasting impact and meet the needs of all teachers. One method to consider for ongoing professional learning is a staff book study.

By reading a book together as a staff, teachers can build shared knowledge with collegial discussion each week, reflect on their practices, implement what they are learning, and then come back to the book discussion to share what worked and what didn't work. Here are four steps to get started:

1. Reflect on your professional development plans for the year. The book study should complement the school and district goals.
2. Determine how you will choose the book. Will it be based on staff interest? Or will you connect the book choice to an existing initiative?
3. Establish goals for the book study. How will you know if it is successful?
4. Determine the book study structure. Consider timing and schedules, staff groupings, and methods for documenting learning and reporting out.

PRINCIPAL'S BRIEF

Strategies for Differentiated Learning

One book, discrete areas of focus.

Just as teachers need to meet the individual needs of their students, teachers also benefit from differentiated professional learning. If all staff are reading the same book together, teachers can self-select sections of the book that they would like to learn/grow from and form separate book groups based on their choices. Jim Knight's book, *High Impact Instruction*, lends well to this structure, as the book features separate parts for planning, instruction, and community-building. Before our staff began reading this book, I had teachers identify their own area for professional growth in our teacher standards, and then identify the book section that aligned with that standard.

Multiple books.

An even better way to allow teachers choice in their professional learning is to plan for multiple book groups, providing teachers with several book titles to choose from. Each book group meets, discusses, implements, and reflects, and then shares out the key learning ideas with the entire staff. Not only does this method allow choice, but it also gives several staff members the opportunity to step up as leaders within each different book group. You will be amazed at how many hallway/staff lounge conversations arise from book studies, resulting in teachers choosing to read the additional books that they hear others raving about.

Virtual meetings.

Teachers can continue to be engaged in their book study discussions outside of a formal meeting through the use of social media and tech tools such as a Twitter hashtag, Facebook group, ongoing TodaysMeet chat, Padlet, Google Docs, or even by having the discussion through the use of a Voxer group. What's great about incorporating the use of a tech tool is that teachers can experience learning with the tool to experience how engaging it is to then add it to their "toolbox" for technology integration with their students.

While staff will likely enjoy the collegial discussions that come from a book study, you will want to make sure that the time and funds invested in the book study are impactful. It will be important to have conversations both in the book study groups and as a whole staff on how this new learning is impacting student learning in classrooms. Provide opportunities for teachers to share key takeaways with staff so that all can benefit. As you're visiting classrooms, make sure to provide teachers with feedback when you recognize them implementing new strategies as a result of their learning, and engage in dialogue with your teachers to encourage their professional reflection on the impact. **□**

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Some other great book study title suggestions include:

- *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov;
- *What Great Teachers Do Differently* by Todd Whitaker;
- *The Daily 5 and The Café Book* by Joan Moser and Gail Boushey;
- *Teach Like a Pirate* by Dave Burgess;
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck; and
- *Fair Isn't Always Equal* by Rick Wormeli.