

Professional Book Study

What is it?

Professional book talks are:

- An opportunity for educators to engage in professional discourse around a specific topic of teaching and learning.
- Individuals committed to reading and discussing a selected book, guided by the question: "How will this book influence professional practices at both the classroom and school level?"

Why is it important?

A professional book talk is important because:

- It initiates the opportunity to examine and discuss a professional topic selected by a cohort of peers.
- It encourages school-wide community dialogue on diverse educational issues that impact student achievement.
- It maintains staff interest in contemporary issues, topics, programs, and educational theory.
- It offers the opportunity to constructively contribute to school identified areas of interest.
- It offers a supportive environment for staff members to engage in job-embedded practices for personal and professional growth.

When is it useful?

- Professional book talks are used when
- A group of educators wish to explore a topic in which they all share a common interest.
- There is a need to examine and discuss a school-wide issue leading to changing a practice or implementing a new instructional focus.
- There is a need to bring staff together to examine/study a topic from different perspectives.

How is it used?

- The professional book talk process includes:
- Identifying a topic, reviewing and selecting a book for study.
- Engaging in formal and informal dialogues around specific content in the book.
- Presenting information from a specific perspective designed by an individual or small group
- Studying in order to make recommendations to impact instruction for promoting student achievement.

To learn more about Professional Book Talks refer to: Donohue, Z., VanTassel, M. & Patterson, L. (1996). *Research in the Classroom Talk, Texts, and Inquiry*, Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

What is a Book Study?

DEFINITION OF A STUDY GROUP

The term "study group," according to several Internet resources, is inspired by the classical method of seminars conducted at schools like Oxford and St John's College.

A study group is a collection of individuals who gather together regularly to improve their understanding of some non-trivial subject, such as a body of great literature, by participating in a focused discussion.

Individuals meet around a table or in a circle for 1 to 2 hours, and group size varies from 3 to as many as 16 individuals. Group size is limited by space or table size and whether folks can see and hear one another during discussion.

The study group organizes and maintains an agenda of readings. Prior to each meeting, participants have read and reflected upon the reading and may come prepared with questions, ideas about, or explanations of the reading.

One individual in the group prepares for and serves as guide and moderator for the discussion during each session. This role is often rotated around the group to individuals who are willing to fill the role of moderator.

STUDY GROUPS VS. LECTURES

A study group, as we've defined it above, is quite different in form and purpose from a lecture. While there is nothing wrong with lectures, they have a tendency to create passive learning experiences for attendees. If one is interested in simply gathering information, a lecture may be a fine place to do it. But if one really wants to understand something, to discuss and weigh information and determine its implications and situational application – discussion in study groups provides a venue that allows the collective wisdom of the group to learn from and apply the information presented in the materials under study.

While attendees of a lecture may seek information, attendees of a study group seek transformation; they want to make what they study not only something they *understand*, but something they may use in their everyday lives or work. The study group thus acts as a bridge, helping people move from passive to active learning. The group's dialogue revolves around getting to a better understanding of the issues presented, the applications of the material to personal and professional experiences, and the implications of the information for consideration as the participants apply it to their lives and/or work.

Suggestions for Leading a Study Group

SELECT A MODERATOR FOR EACH SESSION

The Moderator's Responsibility

A moderator must shape and guide the discussion. A moderator must also ensure that others have listened to and understand their insights and contributions to the discussion. However, it is not necessary for a moderator to be an "expert" on the material selected for a group's study session.

Preparing for a Study Session

The moderator reads the material to be discussed, identifies the most important information, create an outline for the discussion and may prepare some questions to invite participants to reveal their insights from their reading, tie the information to personal and professional experience and identify the implications and application of the information to their daily lives and/or work. The moderator identifies his or her own impressions of the main ideas to be derived from the information. The moderator then generates examples of personal and/or professional experiences that made the information personally *real* and *meaningful*. The moderator develops some ideas about the implications and application the information to daily life and/or work – in this case, to teaching and learning in the classroom. While the moderator's role is to provide participants with opportunities to surface this same thinking from the group, having his or her own thoughts "in reserve", allows the moderator to keep the discussion going when it wanes.

Remember the moderator should not do too much talking on the day. You are to guide the group discussion not teach the group. Insights that you have received during your own study can either be mentioned along the way (if no one else has mentioned them) or used to prompt the discussion on.

Leading a group is not as easy as it sometimes looks. Try to keep the group discussion focused on the main points. You will be amazed at how easy it is for the group to drift off course and start discussing things totally unrelated to the topic in question.

KEEPING THE DISCUSSION FLOWING.

Some people have a tendency to do more talking than others do. There is no harm in this as long as other people are not denied the chance of talking because of them. However make sure the person or people doing the most talking are not going off point.

When leading a group pay attention to body language. Some people just speak out. Others either raise their hands in an attempt to speak or just look at you seeking attention to speak. Those who just speak out tend to do more talking. Do not be afraid to ask them to give way to the person raising his/her hand (or giving off any other signal).

Where someone has not spoken at all during the course of the discussion you can ask him or her (politely) directly if they have anything to contribute.

KEEP TO TIME.

The time allocated to the studies should be known to everyone before the discussion begins. This can vary. It depends on how much you have available. However, this will be one of the hardest parts of the task of being a moderator. Staying on topic and keeping track of time. While there is little value in rushing these studies, it is important for the group to learn to express their ideas succinctly and as briefly as possible so that many ideas can be expressed and discussion does not get bogged down. Watch your time and keep the discussion moving. Yet balance the time when good discussion and important issues are flowing. **Make sure everyone has time to do the closing activity involving a reflection on their learning and a commitment to try something from this learning before the next session.**

Groups of 8 and no more than 10 or 12, make a good size to manage for a study group. This gives each person in the group adequate opportunity to contribute to the discussion and feel "heard."

Suggested "Understanding Poverty" Book Study Format - example

