



Book Group in a Bag

Practical Steps to Creating Book Study Groups

Why do a book study?

A book study is about a conversation; a conversation intended to stretch thinking and influence practice. Book studies are an effective form of professional development and can be used by educators at all levels for their personal and professional growth.

What steps should be considered before planning a book study group?

According to Diane Sweeny in *Learning All the Way*, book study groups are most effective when they are:

- Are voluntary;
- Involve participants in the decision-making process regarding content and group norms;
- Reflect regularly on whether the time spent has been productive;
- Include rituals and celebrations;
- Determine norms and procedures as a group;
- Avoid assuming certain participants are experts (all are here to learn); and
- Consider the book study group a time for learning and reflective participation.

How should the group set up the book study?

- Establish a good physical environment
- Select a facilitator for each meeting
- Use questions in the facilitator's guide to start the discussion
- Create a schedule with timelines.
- Determine goal and objectives. It might be helpful to have some initial goals and objectives and present them to the group. Asking the participants for goals and objectives, again, will draw them into the process.
- Relax, keep it positive
- Snacks and other incentives are always helpful and set the tone for an enjoyable experience.

Other questions to consider:

- Who will facilitate the meetings? Will the facilitator role be rotated between participants?
- How will the group respect and gain input from people with differing opinions or people who are not actively participating?
- How will PDC points be awarded for this process? The group should keep in mind that participants could work on application and impact level by keeping journals of the process, redesigning data systems, etc.



Book Group in a Bag: Facilitator's Guide

Available for Checkout

Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation. (2005). National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.

Book Description

Response to Intervention (RtI) is “the practice of providing high quality instruction/intervention matched to student need and using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions” (5). *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation* helps inform decision-making and provide guidance at both a state and district level regarding the development, implementation, and evaluation of RtI.

Helpful Hints

In order to facilitate the study group most effectively, a team may want to consider doing the following:

- Using technology to support the book study group. Buildings and districts across Kansas have utilized technology including hot links to make the materials more accessible for teachers. Technology will also allow greater participation to time-strapped staff.
- The text contains short, easy to read chapters that can be used during faculty meetings to engage all staff in discourse about RtI.
- Rotate facilitation of the group. In this way, more people will take ownership of the process. *(Please see the Practical Steps to Creating Book Study Groups” document enclosed in this packet.)*

Framing the Context of a Book Study: Powerful Tools for Learning

Two powerful venues for deepening understanding, impacting student outcomes and contributing to the growth of learning organizations are professional learning communities and communities of practice. One of the most effective ways to make your school a learning organization is to create a professional learning community or a community of practice. The concept of a professional learning community is a powerful influence around the work of restructuring schools. According to Rick Dufour in *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*, the fundamental role of schools is “learning, not teaching.”

While Dufour acknowledges that this is “an enormous distinction,” he notes that the emphasis on learning leads those within the school to place their focus and energy on three important questions:

1. What is it we want all students to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skills?
3. How will we respond when students experience difficulty?

Another option for helping schools and districts is to create a community of practice. Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. A community of practice (CoP) makes connections from person to person for mutual inquiry and learning about a practice or issue. Everyone’s voice is needed. Participants develop a shared identity and share a repertoire of knowledge and experiences (Wenger, 2003). Both professional learning communities and communities of practice move system stakeholders from knowing to doing.

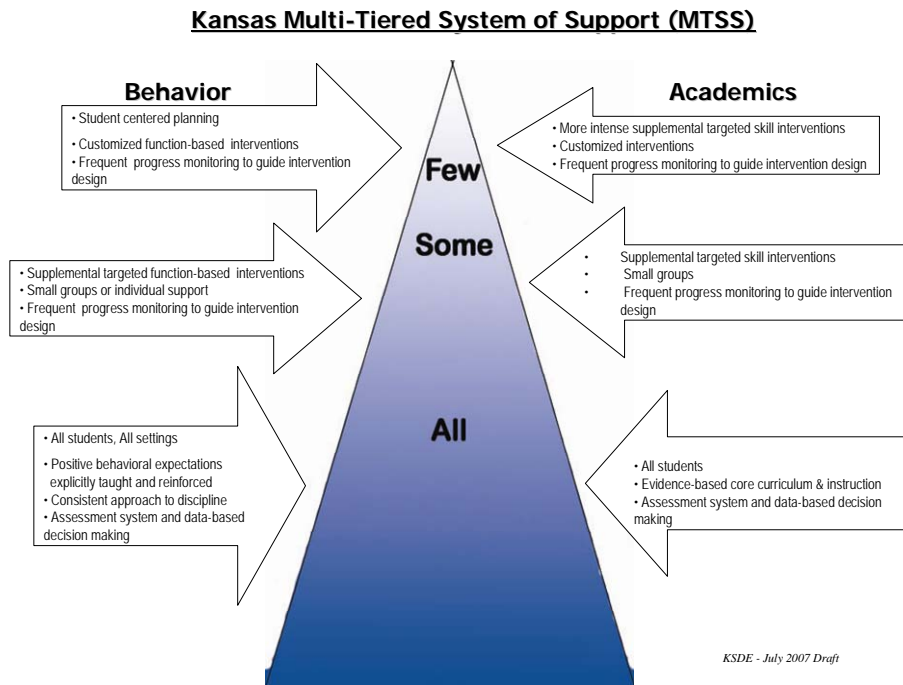
A book study becomes a powerful tool that these communities can use to engage in powerful, professional discourse. A building or existing PLC or CoP may want to add a book study as another tool to aid in professional development. When your school or team begins planning their book study, keep the above questions in mind as a way to frame all discussions around student learning and school improvement.

Framing the Context of Discussion within the Kansas Multi-tiered System of Support

These book studies were created from information and resources gathered by pilot sites who served as early implementers of a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) in Kansas. These schools and districts recommended several books that pertain to the practices embodied by MTSS. In response to the growing demand for more information about MTSS and what it looks like in Kansas, Project SPOT has developed a series of Book Groups in a Bag. Each book bag can be checked out or purchased. For a list of facilitated Book Group in a Bag titles, please see www.Projectspot.org.

The facilitator’s guide has been created to frame learning and discussions specifically within a MTSS framework. MTSS is a coherent continuum of evidence based, system-wide practices to support a rapid response to academic and behavioral needs, with frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision-making to empower each Kansas student to achieve high standards.

Graphically, MTSS looks like this:



The core beliefs underpinning MTSS include:

- Responsibility and leadership are critical at all levels for planning, implementing, and evaluating
- Change at all levels must be intentional, coherent, and dynamic
- Intentional design and redesign of resources are matched to student needs
- An empowering culture creates collective responsibility for student success
- Academic and behavioral performance data are used to inform instructional decisions
- Intervening at the earliest identification of need is necessary for student success (PreK-12)
- Reciprocity between policy and practice is based on research and outcomes
- Collaboration among educators, families and community members is the foundation to effective problem-solving and instructional decision making.

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The following section contains discussion questions broken out by chapter. These questions are designed to facilitate thinking and discussion around *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation*.

Chapter 1: Definition of Response to Intervention (RtI)

Overview

This chapter is a general overview of the most very basic principles of RTI.

Helpful Hints

It might be beneficial for the first day of the book study to actually read chapter one during the time allotted and discuss RtI and what the participants currently know about it. It may also be beneficial to frame the discussion around the following question:

Based on what you read, what is one thing that would look different than what is standard practice in your school?

Discussion Questions

1. Given our current school improvement process, how we do see the principles of RtI embedded with this process?
2. Reflect on Dufour's critical questions. How does your system currently respond when a student is not successful? Is your school/district's response systematic?
3. What is the current role of data-based decision-making in your system?

Chapter 2: RtI Foundations in Research and Policy

Overview

This chapter presents a foundation for many of the reasons the current system of “wait to fail” needs to be shifted to prevention-focused model. Chapter 2 could also be supplemented with other titles discussing RtI in more detail from the Book Group in a Bag series. See www.projectspot.org for a complete list of titles.

Helpful Hints

This short chapter is loaded with major philosophical issues that are likely to generate great, but potentially spirited discussion. Be prepared to spend some time on this chapter. Any of the bolded heading or bulleted points could be used as starters for discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What would be the benefits of an integrated system in order to provide students with what they need rather than a distinct line between special and general education?
2. What does our current service delivery look?
3. How are we monitoring the effectiveness of current programs (at-risk, special education, Title I, ESL, etc.)?
4. How do we currently respond when students are not meeting expectations? What response mechanisms do we currently have in place?
5. How is support provided to all teachers to ensure students meet expectations?
6. How does our problem solving process resemble what was described?

Chapter 3: Support for RtI in Federal Law

Overview

Chapter 3 discusses the evolution of federal education law and how IDEA 2004 has facilitated implementation of the RtI provision.

Helpful Hint

A review of local and state policies/regulations would be helpful when facilitating discussion for this chapter. Current practices will need to be examined and with the reauthorization of IDEA, many doors have been opened and this chapter identifies some (flexible use of funding, functional identification procedures, etc.). Practices, policies, and regulations need to be examined.

Discussion Questions

1. Have our practices shifted from what IDEA 97 proposed to what IDEA 2004 proposed? How would they be different?
2. The concept of “lack of instruction” has been a part of evaluation procedures for some time; however, the practices being described make this question even more important by linking it to NCLB regulations as well as IDEA. Simply checking “yes” because the student has good attendance will no longer be sufficient and a critical analysis of the instruction needs to occur. How will we respond?
3. Do our assessment practices provide adequate information to guide decision-making and instruction? How so?
4. How do our local policies align with the national education policies?
5. How do we evaluate our current programs and any new programs to determine if they are evidenced-based practices?
6. How do we support the teachers in finding and utilizing evidence based instructional practices?
7. How do we evaluate the effectiveness of our instruction?
8. What evidence-based instructional or evaluation practices/procedures are we currently using?
9. How do we know if what we are doing is evidence-based?
10. Does our service delivery model align with the current research on best practices for children with disabilities?

Chapter 4: Core Principles of RtI

Overview

Chapter 4 contains specific information about the core principles of RtI.

Helpful Hints

Again, another chapter loaded with issues that will require examination of many philosophical beliefs that could spark passionate discussion. It may be beneficial to jigsaw this chapter in order to facilitate more in-depth discussion about current practice in light of the core principles of RtI.

Discussion Questions

1. What would a building or district system look like that addressed the core RtI principles?
2. How do we currently monitor progress? How are assessments used in your building?
3. Do we or how can we provide teachers with the time and resources for early intervention?
4. What is our role as educators in early intervention?

Chapter 5: Essential Components of RtI

Overview

Chapter 5 discusses the essential components of RtI. Included within the discussion is a rationale for these components as well as an in-depth examination of the essential component.

Helpful Hints

It would be helpful for whoever is facilitating this chapter to be knowledgeable about what assessments the school is currently using at each grade level. The facilitator should refer to page 4 for the list of core beliefs of MTSS. It would be beneficial to discuss them in tandem with the core beliefs of RtI.

Discussion Questions

1. Is our core program scientifically research-based? If not, are our instructional practices that we're using to deliver the material scientifically validated? How do we differentiate instruction within the core?
2. What data do we currently use to inform our decisions? What universal screenings do we have in place and what do we need in order to have a comprehensive system of screening data?
3. How different would a tiered system look compared to what we have in place now with our problem solving team?
4. What would problem-solving (decision-making system) look like at each tier? Would it be a different team at each tier? What improvements would this make to our current system?
5. Does our current assessment system contain the nine characteristics described?
6. Do we have the infrastructure in place to provide teachers with the time needed to collaborate in order to analyze data and differentiate instruction?
7. If our expectation is that teachers are collaborating to analyze data at the grade, classroom, and individual student level, how are we supporting this?
8. How do we insure we are being responsible in making sure interventions are evidence-based? – think district level, building level, classroom level?
9. Do we have a sufficient pool of evidence-based interventions to draw from and implement with integrity?

Chapter 6: Special Education Eligibility Determination in RtI

Overview

This chapter provides guidance on eligibility criteria for special education.

Helpful Hints

If there are school psychologists in the book study group, be prepared to engage in detailed and intense discussion, as this could be a significant paradigm shift from their current belief system and practices. Keeping an open mind will be critical.

The phrase “opening the floodgates” might be used when discussing this chapter. This is a typical response to the paradigm shift. Keep in mind that appropriately and effectively utilizing RtI in the eligibility process hinges upon many other variables being in place, most importantly that the core curriculum is evidence-based, being implemented with fidelity, and meeting the needs of at least 80% of the students. Additionally, the use of evidence-based interventions implemented with fidelity is critical as well. When these components are effectively addressed, the issue of the “floodgates” opening should be eliminated.

Reminding the group of this element to RtI will be helpful.

Although the exclusionary factors have been in place for many years, IDEIA 2004, through RtI, makes them a more dominant and important feature of eligibility determination.

Additionally, the law is linked with NCLB requirements of scientifically validated practices, which makes them even more critical. These will be difficult, but necessary, discussions to engage in and the facilitator will need to be prepared to bring up such issues in a sensitive manner. RtI is a process that should be used to bring educators together by creating a more seamless system between general and special education.

Chapters 3, 7, 9, and 10 from *Response to Intervention: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice* would be good supplements to this chapter.

Discussion Questions

1. How do our current procedures to determine special education eligibility align with what is being proposed?
2. Do we have the skills necessary to conduct evaluations in the manner being recommended?
3. How do our state regulations and procedures align with what is proposed? How do our district or cooperative procedures align with what is proposed?
4. What role would standardized tests play?
5. Examine and discuss the differences highlighted on page 31.

Chapter 7: RtI Policy Considerations

Overview

Chapter 7 discusses policy considerations for states, including specific policy questions to guide thinking.

Helpful Hints

This chapter is geared towards professionals at the state education agency; however, it would be beneficial to read and discuss this chapter at the local level. Having the participants identify what policies, guidance, and assistance are needed at the local level will aid district leadership when communicating with the state.

Kansas is in the process of developing guidance for local districts with implementation of a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) which embraces the concepts of RtI. Have a discussion about how the local districts can proceed. It might be helpful to have excerpts from IDEIA 2004 and NCLB to illustrate that the federal laws have given LEAs flexibility and independence to implement RtI practices.

Discussion Questions

1. Do our local and state policies support what is being proposed?

Chapter 8: RtI Professional Development

Overview

This chapter details the significant professional development necessary to implement RtI.

Helpful Hints

District leadership needs to keep an open mind when launching into this chapter and set the stage for the participants to be open and honest in detailing what professional development is needed to implement RtI.

Although this chapter may appear to be most appropriate for administrators or those individuals responsible for planning professional development, do not assume that teachers or other faculty would not contribute helpful information for planning. It is best practice for educators to have input and ownership into professional development.

Discussion Questions

1. After reading the book, what training do you think would be necessary to implement RTI?
2. How can a building embed these practices into their school improvement plan and results-based staff development plan?
3. RTI calls for a paradigm shift which represents a change from looking at problems and disability as a problem within the student to viewing a problem as a discrepancy from what is expecting to what is occurring. With this shift, teaching procedures will be evaluated and examined as to how they may be contributing to the concern, which may cause some teacher to feel vulnerable. How do we avoid this or develop a mindset that will enable teachers and other educators to be open to this way of thinking?

