



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

Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4-12 (2000). Janet Allen
Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.

Book Description

Yellow Brick Roads provides a path for teachers to follow in developing their own literacy program. It focuses on grades 4-12 language arts classrooms or Tier 2 reading classrooms. Allen focuses on literacy development through making reading and writing so enticing that students can't resist. She promotes reaching students where they are and respecting them for their individual differences. *Yellow Brick Roads* outlines and directs the use of read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, writing, and vocabulary development. It also provides many tools for assessing and evaluating students and their progress.

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.
- Always provide a time or forum for teachers to respond to what speaks to them.
- 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.

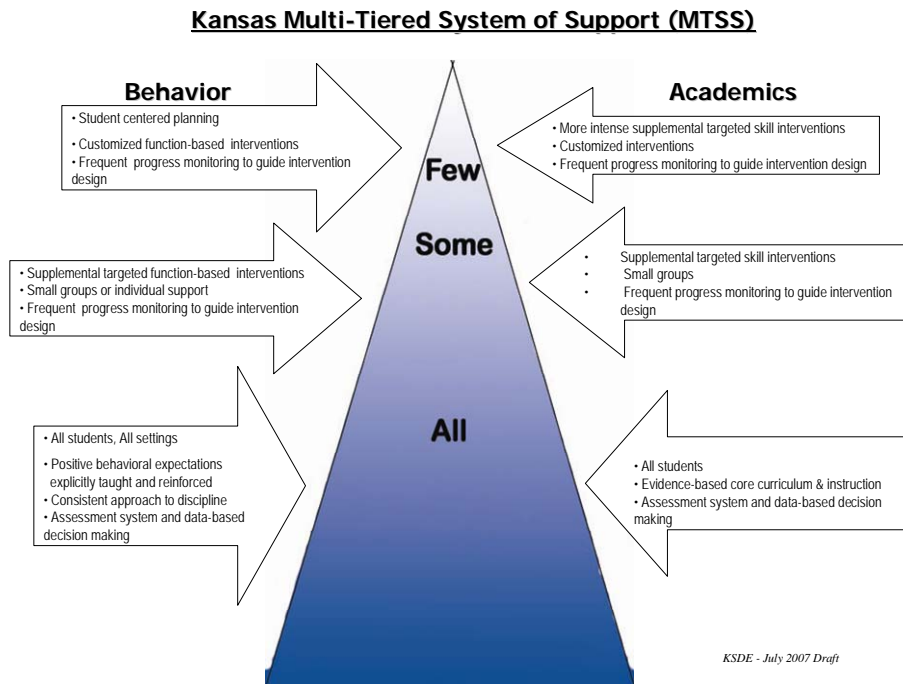
A book study becomes a powerful tool that these communities can use to engage in powerful, professional discourse. A building or existing PLC or CoP may want to add a book study as another tool to aid in professional development. When your school or team begins planning their book study, keep the above 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 *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4-12*.

Chapter 1: Looking for the Wizard

Overview

Allen begins by reflecting on her first experiences as a teacher in a situation that many find themselves, teaching struggling or reluctant readers with no resources. She notes the importance of listening closely to students and discusses the many fads in education. Allen concludes that there is no wizard (teaching method or strategy) that will solve our problems for us, but it is up to teachers to make the choice to take it upon themselves to solve the problems they face.

Helpful Hints

While reading Allen's introduction, it is helpful to reflect on yourself and how your experiences are similar to or differ from Allen's experiences. Think about where your current personal position is in your professional life.

Discussion Questions

1. Create a timeline or graphic organizer that highlights your professional growth to reflect on your first few years of teaching. Discuss what were the strong influences in your career paths. How does the environment at your school encourage or discourage the path to professionalism for novice and experienced teachers.
2. What fads in education have been witnessed by your group? What has contributed to their success or failure?
3. Divide into two groups. Group A should identify characteristics of successful students. Where do they attribute their successes or failures? Group B should identify characteristics of struggling students. Where do they attribute their successes and failures? Share this information in whole group. How does this inform your teaching and interactions with students?
4. Review the list of effective teacher characteristics on page seven. Individually note which ones you have and those you need to work on. With a partner discuss these. Set some goals. How can you work on some of these challenges or where can you get information on them.
5. Discuss these questions that Allen poses at the closing of this chapter: What is really worth knowing? What is really worth teaching?

Chapter 2: Places for Wonderful Ideas: Establishing Environments That Support Reading Diversity

Overview

This chapter discusses how to work with resistant learners. It outlines the conditions for learning: expectation, responsibility, immersion, demonstrations, approximation, use, and response.

Helpful Hints

As you read this chapter, think about the overall environment of the classroom Allen describes and connect this to your most resistant students.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss a teacher's responsibility in "making" a student learn. Create a list of interventions a teacher may employ in working with resistant learners.
2. What was the predecessor to Allen being able to seize the opportunity and teach her students about Florida and in finally getting participation from Shawn? Discuss the role of relationship building Allen does with her students.
3. Discuss Allen's goals in creating "lifelong readers." What would you change, add, or delete? How could you create these goals with your students?
4. What is the reasoning teachers often give for using round-robin reading? Develop counters to these excuses (i.e. find other ways to hold students' attention, check them for fluency, etc.).
5. Discuss the difference between independent and dependent learners. Identify the characteristics of some of your dependent learners and brainstorm some ways you could encourage their independence.
6. Discuss ways to immerse students in literacy. Create a three column chart that identifies what you do now, what you want to be able to do, and how you will do it.
7. Review the Language Experience Activity on page 24. Modify a lesson you already do, or create one you would like to do, using the LEA.
8. Discuss the importance of risk-taking. How do teachers hinder or encourage risk-taking? What accommodation does Allen make and what are some others that would encourage students to fully express their ideas, regardless of the risk?

Chapter 3: What Gets in the Way of Reading Success?

Overview

Chapter 3 breaks down struggling and reluctant readers into four groups: “I Can’t” Readers, “I Don’t Know How” Readers, “I’d Rather” Readers, and “I Don’t Care” Readers. Allen also addresses motivation, resources, and assessments and their roles in reading success.

Helpful Hint

While reading, try categorizing your students in one of the four groups and think about how that information will help you address their needs.

Discussion Questions

1. Break into four groups to create a jigsaw activity. Assign each group one of the four types of readers that Allen describes. Each group must use personal experience to create a student prototype or real student that you have. Provide background knowledge and ways to teach/engage/motivate/accommodate this student. Share out with the whole group.
2. On page 38, Allen states that many students stop reading in high school. Take some time discuss why this might be the case. Do teachers and schools have a role in continuing to promote reading in the high school? Brainstorm what teachers you know or what your school does to promote reading. Is there more that can be done?
3. On page 39, Allen states, “In order to get to the point where the study of literature can be interesting and exciting, readers must first have had the strong personal experience of discovering the magic of books, which seems available just to the individual.” Discuss this notion in relation to how language arts is taught in your classroom and at your school.

Chapter 4: Life is Short – Eat Dessert First! The Value of Read-Aloud Beyond the Primary Years

Overview

Read-alouds are a very cost effective, time efficient method to use in building many of the skills effective readers need. In this chapter, Allen outlines the read aloud, provides do and don'ts, and gives many ideas for making this technique successful.

Helpful Hints

While reading this chapter, think about some read-alouds or texts you have used or would love to use with students. Bring these selections to this discussion group to share and build your libraries.

You may want to begin this discussion with a read aloud. Think about an inspirational teaching passage, or maybe even just a funny seen you might read to your students.

Discussion Questions

1. Older students who have not had the benefit of listening to fluent reading since grade school often deem read-alouds as being for babies. What are some ways to show them this isn't so? How can you set up read-alouds so it doesn't seem like circle time in kindergarten?
2. You may need to beef up your defense of read-alouds when word gets out that this is what you are doing. Take some time discuss these benefits and practice crafting them into a good defense. Role-playing this situation may be a useful practice.
3. Put it altogether by discussing the purposes for a read-aloud, the teacher preparation, the student preparation, and way to assess if your read-aloud was a home-run.
4. Classroom behavior can sometimes be a concern during this “unstructured” activity. Take some time to discuss the expectations of read-alouds and the classroom procedures that go with them.
5. Which group of students would benefit most from a read-aloud?

Chapter 5: Shared Reading as the Heart of Reading Instruction

Overview

In Chapter 5, Allen provides the rationale and techniques for using shared reading in your classroom. She discusses shared reading in use with whole class, as well as, independently.

Helpful Hints

Make note of the various benefits of shared reading. Think about specific students you've had that could benefit from this strategy.

Discussion Questions

For the following questions, you may want to refer to the MTSS diagram listed at the beginning of this guide. Think about the following questions in terms of the levels/intensity of support necessary in a multi-tiered system.

1. Discuss the following concern that Allen brings up about shared reading: "But what if I spend all this time getting them to enjoy reading and then they get a high school (or college) teacher who doesn't believe any of this – someone who just gives them boring books and tells them to read it for homework?" (pg. 59-60)
 - a. What is the stereotypical high school's perspective on the enjoyment of reading?
 - b. What is the stereotypical middle school's perspective on this?
 - c. What is your personal perspective?
2. With a partner, share your experiences (as a teacher or a student) with round-robin reading. In group, create a statement about round-robin reading along with alternatives that you could share with the rest of your school.
3. Allen encourages the use of recorded books to support students. Discuss these benefits. Note where your school is in the abilities to do this. Do you have recorded books to support students receiving tier 2 or tier 3 support? Are they available in the classroom environment or only in supplemental programs? What do you need in order to utilize this support?
4. On page 64 is a list of questions to ask prior to a shared reading experience. Before meeting as a discussion group, have teachers select a piece they would use as a shared reading. In partners, discuss the texts validity as a shared reading experience. How can these questions guide lesson planning? Consider the variety of students you have in your class. Could shared reading be used in differentiating the lesson?
5. Throughout this chapter, Allen hints at ways to keep students engaged during shared reading. Create a list of these to use as a reminder. Can you think of more of your own to add to the list?

6. Discuss how to select texts for your students. What criteria could you follow in selecting texts for tier 1, 2, and 3 level instruction? What are you teaching now, that may be good for shared reading?

Chapter 6: Guided Reading: “On the Run” Strategies toward Independence

Overview

Chapter 6 introduces guided reading to the secondary classroom. Allen provides the rationale and guidelines to make this work.

Helpful Hints

In reading this chapter, you may find it most helpful to let go of all preconceived notions of what a secondary language arts classroom is “supposed” to look like. Instead, think about what you wish you could get every single one of your students to do in interacting with a text.

Discussion Questions

1. Create a T-Chart to illustrate the differences between shared and guided reading.
2. Discuss what you might use as the basis to divide you students into small groups.
3. Since answering questions at the end of the text is not the goal of guided reading, what is?
4. How might this strategy be useful to working with students in all tiers?
5. Think about your students in tiers 2 and 3. What do you think you might learn from them in a small group setting where you’re reading for the process of reading and not to answer a question? What do you think their reactions would be?
6. Discuss how you might plan differently in planning a guided reading lesson. In doing so, create a list of meaningful activities the rest of the class may be engaged in while the guided reading lesson takes place.

Chapter 7: Creating (and Living with) Independent Readers

Overview

In this chapter, Allen discusses the importance of independent reading and the crucial components of time, choice, availability, and success.

Helpful Hints

Focus on your personal habits as a reader. How do you choose what to read? When do you read? Why do you read? Do you ever reread a book? Do you ever stop before you finish? Do you share your reading or belong to a book club?

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss why students lose the passion for reading as they move up in grades.
2. Allen reports that access to books is the number one factor in literacy development. Discuss this in terms of the achievement gap. What does your school do or what could they do?
3. Assess your school's resources for independent reading. Does your school have classroom libraries? What do they contain? Is there a range of levels, interests, genres? Do you subscribe to magazines? If you are dissatisfied with this resource, what could you do to get one? Are there funds available? Is there a local organizations that gives grants? This may be a time to make a plan.
4. Allen notes that at one time her students had too many choices. Discuss this in relation to using a public or school library to find books.
5. How can you make independent reading successful for students in all tiers?
6. With a partner, create a protocol you could use with independent reading. How much time, when, and what? What would it look like? What are rules? What about accountability?

Chapter 8: Organizing for Choice: Supporting Diversity in Reading, Writing, and Learning

Overview

Chapter 8 provides a class structure to support choice. Allen then goes in depth about her Independent Learning Exploration activity.

Helpful Hints

Think about choices you provide your students and the outcomes of those choices.

Discussion Questions

1. On page 115, Allen states, “I had to let go of the notion that all students would have equivalent products at the end of a day, week, or grading period. Teachers who support choices for learners come to realize that they may have the same learning goals and standards for excellence for all students but students’ choices for achieving those goals and demonstrating learning can be vastly different from one student to another.” Discuss where you are individually and as a school in terms of differentiating for different levels of students and in the grading of different products.
2. What is your response to Allen’s charts of a balanced literacy week? (pg. 116-117) Take some time to map out your own balanced literacy week. How does that compare with Allen’s?
3. The choice Allen provides for her students is more than choosing to take notes or filling in a graphic organizers. Why do you think she is such a large proponent of her ILE time? Discuss some hurdles teachers may need to overcome to institute such large scale choice.

Chapter 9: “Am I the Only One Who Can’t Make a K-W-L Work?” Literacy Paths to Content Knowledge

Overview

Chapter 9 tackles the difficulties that come with content reading. Allen reinforces the importance of the reading process and using this process to help struggling students.

Helpful Hints

Think about the specific difficulties your tier two and three students have when reading their textbook assignments.

Discussion Questions

1. Take some time to discuss the habits of struggling students in your school. Do they read the assignments? Which ones? What do teachers do to support these students?
2. The demands of covering the content are often used as an excuse to rush the teaching. What is Allen’s response to this? Discuss what your content responsibilities are and to whom?
3. Allen modifies the KWL to include building background knowledge right at the beginning. Choose a unit you teach and think about what background knowledge will need to be present for students to ask meaningful questions. How will you frontload this knowledge for your students? Would you do this whole class or with groups?
4. Consider the strengths and weaknesses to the TAG strategy. What makes it successful? What would need to be done to support tier 2 and 3 students in an activity like this?
5. Create a list of your own after reading activities that you do. Compare these with Allen’s examples. Would yours pass her test? What could you do in your classroom to make sure every student has an opportunity to own and transfer their learning, taking into consideration their individual differences?

Chapter 10: Help for the Most “Tangled” Readers

Overview

Chapter 10 acknowledges that students who struggle with reading, may have many other hurdles in their way as well. Allen uses four roles of readers to talk about how to scaffold at each of these levels of reading.

Helpful Hints

Keep in mind the MTSS model particularly as you read this section.

Discussion Questions

1. What seems to be the cause of students disengaging in your school? What can be done to remedy this?
2. Allen introduces the use of academic journal. What do you use or plan to use to help students keep track of the strategies learned.
3. Allen provides many strategies to use with students. Discuss which of the strategies in the code breaker section are appropriate for which students. How can they be modified to meet students’ needs?
4. Describe the reactions to various texts in your class. Are these reactions reflective of students all levels? What makes the difference?
5. Discuss the importance of questioning during reading. How can you support students in creating good questions?
6. React to Allen’s statement on page 117, “While I would never argue that students shouldn’t be exposed to classical literature, some texts are just not developmentally appropriate for the readers in our classroom.” How can this be handled in a diverse classroom.

Chapter 11: Reading the Way to Writing

Overview

In describing a balanced literacy program, Allen can't leave out the importance of writing. In this chapter she discusses how it is tied with reading and how reading can be the prompt for strong idea development.

Helpful Hints

While reading, ask yourself: What is the connection between reading and writing?

Discussion Questions

1. At the end of the first paragraph, Allen differentiates a teacher of writing from an assigner of writing. Make a T-chart and list the characteristics of each.
2. Discuss the literature Allen has promoted to this point and how it links to writing.
3. Debrief the idea of language collections. Which level of students could this support the best?
4. List and discuss the elements of teaching writing that are promoted in this chapter. How can these be incorporated in your classroom?

Chapter 12: Full Circle: Assessing, Evaluating, and Starting Again

Overview

Chapter 12 breaks down the differences between assessing and evaluating. Allen provides many new tools for assessing students as they progress. She wraps up the chapter discussing the importance of allowing assessment information and reflective teaching drive the classroom.

Helpful Hints

Notice the variety or characteristics Allen is able to assess with each of her methods.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative assessment and how they are informative for varying students. What is the connection to grading?
2. Make a three column chart to include the following: methods of assessing, target information, targeted student. (i.e. Is a five paragraph essay a good initial assessment tool for tier 2 and tier 3 students?)
3. How does varying and ongoing assessment impact grading for the purpose of the report card?

Chapter 13: Living the Professional Life

Overview

In wrapping up her book, Allen restates the importance in creating your own best practice programs that work for you and your students rather than giving in to a scripted model, she reinforces the need for teachers to continue with professional development, and she encourages us to learn from our students.

Helpful Hints

Reflect on what it means to be a professional and how that correlates with your teaching.

Discussion Questions

1. Allen states, “If we don’t take on both the rewards and responsibility of that professional commitment we risk teaching in environments and with resources that are counterproductive for the reading work we need to accomplish” (pg. 230). What does this mean to you? Discuss where you and your building are in regards to this quote.
2. Create two T-charts and list the pros and cons of (a) creating your own program and (b) buying a scripted program.
3. Now what? Having read, studied, and discussed Allen’s work, where do you go from here? What professional development needs to happen? Do you have a class outline in mind? What do you need to make it happen? In other words, how will this impact your teaching?

