

# Study Groups

Meeting the Individual Professional  
Needs of Teachers

2010 National Reading Recovery & K-6  
Classroom Literacy Conference

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Remember that in the end it will be teachers who make a difference in children's school lives. It is teachers who will either lead the change or resist and stymie it. The focus of school change has to be on supporting teachers in their efforts to become more expert and reorganizing all the aspects of the educational system so that they can teach as expertly as they know how.

Richard Allington

# Study Groups

- Provide teachers with opportunity to reflect, review, and integrate new thinking into their classroom instruction
- Assist teachers to integrate new literacy practices into an existing cohesive literacy framework
- Focus is on examining our thinking versus trying activities. They provide **think** time.

# Getting Started with Study Groups

- Start small
- Send an e-mail asking if anyone would like to meet as a group to explore reading and writing topics
- Follow the lead of the teachers

“This form of professional development gave me so much as a learner. I was actively involved in my own learning from start to finish. The support given by the group makes it safe and easy to try new things.”

one teacher's evaluation of study groups

# Facilitator's Role

## Host/hostess and party planner:

Solicit volunteers

Find resources

Set meeting dates & location

Provide refreshments

Copy materials

# Solicit Volunteers

Don't limit invitees to full-time, on-site faculty; welcome instructional aides, student interns, and itinerant teachers.

# Meeting dates

- Set the date well in advance so people can arrange for rides, childcare, etc. Use a poster or e-mail message to remind people a day or two before the meeting.
- Set a definite ending time so everyone knows how much time to commit. End early, and some people may come back to continue an unfinished conversation.

# Location, location, location

Choose a location that most teachers will pass like the teachers' lounge, the cafeteria, on the way to the parking lot...

# Food that smells...?

Order pizza – food is a great draw,  
and the smell may attract people  
who decide to stay.

# Ground Rules

- Person leading the group does not teach
- Group is open and no one person is the expert
- These are not gripe sessions
- Conversations need to stay positive and professional

# Lesson Learned:

*Take the time necessary to build trust and respect necessary to establish a strong professional community. It is unlikely the exquisite professional conversations will occur until a caring, thoughtful community is in place. Community is at the heart of genuine inquiry.*

Mills, p. 23

# Sample Study Group Offerings

## Moving from Levels to Supports in Designing Instruction (Grades 2-3)

Teachers explore *Beyond Leveled Books* as they think in new ways about how to help readers in grades 2-5. Organizing for thoughtful instruction and grouping of transitional readers will be a focus.

# Sample Study Group Offerings

## Creating Strategic Readers (Grades 3-5)

This group will work with the book *Still Learning to Read* by Frank Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak. The book focuses on comprehension strategies and getting students to be strategic readers.

# Sample Study Group Offering

## Writing Nonfiction (Grades 3-5)

This group will explore the topic of reading and writing nonfiction with students. We will look at the book *Is That a Fact?* by Tony Stead with an emphasis on teaching students how to write nonfiction.

# Planning and Scheduling Groups

- 6 to 8 participants per group
- Select study group meeting dates: start in October, no December, end in April
- Options: before school (6:45-7:45am), during out-class, after school
- Provide participants with the book study schedule for the year

# Study Group Routine

- Whole-Group Discussion (20 minutes)
- Viewing Videotape or Reading a Book Excerpt (20 minutes)
- Whole-Group Discussion: Putting Ideas into Practice (20 minutes)

# Whole-Group Opening Discussion

At the first meeting, time is spent reflecting on current practices and creating a learning community.

During future meetings, time is spent sharing new thinking and ideas that participants have tried.

# Lessons Learned:

*We need to recognize the power of conversation in learning – to allow the focus of the meetings to emerge from the teachers' concerns, insights, passions, and questions, to theorize from practice, and to promote inquiry as a stance that pervades our classroom practices and curricular conversations.*

Mills, pp. 26-27

# Whole Group Opening Discussion

- Focus sheets on the table as participants come in

## Typical Focus Questions:

What are you thinking as a result of our last session?

What is working well in your classroom?

What are potential roadblocks to implementing change in your classroom?

- Participants take a few minutes and jot down their thinking

# Whole Group Opening Discussion

- The focus is on new thinking from the text rather than the adoption of new activities
- Provides teachers with time and opportunity to process their new thinking

# Viewing the Video or Reading a Book Excerpt

- Read a few pages from the focus text to whet the appetites of the participants

OR

- Watch a video segment utilizing two-column journal entry

# Viewing the Video/Reading Excerpt

Opportunity for the group  
to work with current research/resources  
around the chosen topic

# Videos

- Provide the visual links to instruction not always captured through professional books
- Teachers like getting the opportunity to see how other teachers use their classroom space

# Two-Column Journal

Ideas You Might  
Want to Try

Obstacles That May  
Prevent You from Trying

# Two-Column Journal

Similarities to Your  
Classroom

Differences to Your  
Classroom

# Whole-Group Instruction

## Putting Ideas into Practice

- Share thoughts about the video, reading and putting the ideas into practice.
- Group decides on pages they will read for next session
- Participants encouraged to try something new in the classroom and bring samples of student work to share at the next session

# Helpful Hints

- Group moves along at a pace that suits them
- Outlined time frame does not have to be strictly adhered to

# Follow-Up Between Sessions

- Leave charts up or post minutes in a public place to intrigue those who missed the session. Maybe they'll be curious enough to join the group next time.
- Remind participants of the next meeting and the materials they need to bring.
- Provide additional resources to help participants implement new ideas.

# Resources That May Be Helpful

- Highlighters
- Post-its of varied sizes
- Highlighting tape
- Folders
- Post-It flags
- Journals
- Plastic sheet protectors

# Teacher Comments

*“I rate study groups as the highest form of professional development.”*

*We find that our most productive efforts are always collaborative. We stimulate in each other thoughts that don't occur in ourselves. We go away from our ...meetings with ideas and try them out and then try to get a perspective that is broader... You have an extended mind when you have the benefit of everyone's wisdom.*

Ben Brabson, physicist, in Mills, p. 21

# Teacher Comments

“Study groups provide me an opportunity to talk and share with my colleagues. We never seem to have time during the regular school day. Throughout the year, I feel the group breathes new life into teaching.”

# A Worthy Investment

*Study groups provide participants with the opportunity to fulfill their professional cravings, and at the same time improve the quality of instruction delivered to students in the classroom.*

Jennifer Allen, [Becoming a Literacy Leader](#)

# References

Allen, Jennifer (2006). Becoming a literacy leader: supporting learning and change.

Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Mills, Heidi, et al. "When Teachers Have Time to Talk: The Value of Curricular Conversations." *Language Arts* 79.1 (September 2001): 20-28.

*Read, Share, Teach* (RST).

[www.stenhouse.com](http://www.stenhouse.com)