



★ It's in the Bag ★

Book Study Groups have long been one of the least expensive and most enjoyable ways for educators to grow professionally. Study groups provide structured time for reflection on student work and classroom practice. A book study group can be formed in your school, your district, or even online. The study group method is invaluable in bringing together groups of colleagues who can use the classroom as an arena for studies, discussions and experience exchange and turn it into a “laboratory” for trying out new teaching methods skills and practices gleaned from the books studied. The hallmarks of a successful book study group are teacher engagement, superior use of time, and sustainable changes in student achievement.

Facilitator's Guide

Resources available for Checkout: *Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work*, (2003). Debbie Diller, Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, Maine

Book Description: *Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work* will help teachers resolve the dilemma of what does the rest of the class do while a teacher is working with a small reading group. Debbie Diller offers practical suggestions for over a dozen literacy work stations that link to instruction and make preparation and management easy for teachers. Readers will learn how to create and set up work stations, how to manage them, and how to keep them going throughout the school year.

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 (PLC) 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.

Facilitating Successfully:

In order to facilitate the study groups most effectively, a district, school or team may want to consider the following:

- Treat study groups as a school-wide teacher professional development model.
- State the purpose for the book study groups in terms of specific student needs (these needs should be based on an analysis of student data).
- Study groups can be job-embedded, with principals freeing up time during the school day, or during superintendent conference days, faculty meetings, etc.
- Groups should be small and manageable, their work "published."
- Study groups need support from administrators.
- Work within study groups is built around the participants' search for knowledge according to their own needs and the needs of their students.

- Members meet regularly and work according to a study plan that they often develop themselves (the plan will include how often to meet, for how long, how many chapters will be discussed per meeting, where to meet, etc.).
- Everyone in a study group is responsible for getting the work done and for achieving the jointly agreed upon goals.
- The goals of a study group can be:
 - To offer a good method for teachers to cooperate more actively in order “to awaken their students’ minds” about sustainable development.
 - To integrate sustainable development into all curriculum subjects.
 - To provide teachers with the opportunity to share both good and bad teaching experiences and to get support from colleagues and professional books.
 - To encourage teachers to work together to solve a problem.
 - To get teachers motivated to pursue education for sustainable development—to make a difference.
- The facilitator should engage in the following behaviors:
 - Be diplomatic – suggest, but don’t subscribe.
 - Act as an advisor.
 - Be respectful;
 - Be professional, relaxed and be present in the situation.
 - Don’t intervene too much – let the group work on what they feel is important.
 - Encourage, inspire and support.
- During the last meeting, ask these questions:
 - What positive outcomes did we achieve?
 - What problems did we encounter?
 - What lessons have we learned that could be useful to other groups?
 - What do we do next?

The following section contains discussion questions broken out by chapter. These questions are designed to facilitate thinking and discussion around ***Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work.***

Chapter 1: What is a Literacy Work Station?

Overview

This chapter will introduce the definition of “literacy work station” and focus your thinking on the important differences between literacy work stations versus traditional learning centers.

Helpful Hints

Keep in mind the types of learning centers that you currently have in your classrooms and try to identify not only the differences between your centers and Debbie Diller’s work stations, but how you might be able to convert your current centers into Debbie’s model, without starting over from “square one.”

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Share your new ideas about literacy work stations with a colleague. Discuss the definition of work stations provided in this chapter (on page 2).

Extension - How did this chapter change your thinking about what literacy work stations actually are?

2. Think about your students and their level of engagement. What specific things most engaged them recently? Make a list of these and continue to plan similar kinds of activities.

Extension - Building upon what engages your students, what topics and/or activities will you or have you built into your first work station(s).

3. Try using the gradual release of responsibility approach. Think about something new you’ve learned to do and how you probably went through a similar process. Plan for your first work stations using this model.

Extension – How did your own experiences with learning through “gradual release of responsibility approach” assure positive outcomes for your students during their initial work station experience in your classroom?

4. Make a list of your non-negotiables for your classroom. Determining these early in the year will help you create a successful plan. Share your list with someone from your grade level and discuss your ideas. Post your list somewhere in your classroom where you can see it as a daily reminder.

Extension – Were you able to introduce “non-negotiables” successfully in your classroom? Why or why not?

Chapter 2: How Do I Use Literacy Work Stations?

Overview

This chapter deals with the management of literacy work centers, with attention to mini-lessons and management boards.

Helpful Hints

Establishing literacy work stations is one of the best things you can do to engage your students in meaningful, independent practice that will help them become better readers and writers.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Think about what literacy work stations should look like, sound like, and feel like in your classroom. Be as specific as possible. You might brainstorm with a group of colleagues who teach your grade. Then brainstorm with your class. Share your class's list with your colleagues. What did the students come up with that you hadn't thought about? How did this exercise help you? How did it help your students?

Extension – Were your students' thoughts on work stations "universal?" That is, did other students in your study group partners' classrooms match or overlap in their thinking? Were students' suggestions important in changing the level of students' successes with particular stations?

2. Plan several mini-lessons for your work stations with a colleague. Think about everything that kids might possibly not do right, and include those things in your mini-lesson. That way students will know exactly what you expect. You might videotape a mini-lesson and share it with teachers from your grade level. Discuss how this mini-lesson helped your students.

Extension – Was working with a colleague helpful with the creation of a mini-lesson? What did the videotaped lessons teach your group?

3. Choose a literacy work station from your classroom that you've had trouble with. Brainstorm with a colleague what to do to improve the work station.

Extension – Describe an unsuccessful work station that was "improved" after working with a colleague. What factors were most important to that success?

4. With a colleague, develop a plan for behavior at a literacy work station. Let students know exactly what will happen if they don't follow the rules. On a weekly basis, meet with your colleague to discuss your plan until the children's behavior is well established. Readjust your plan as needed.

Extension – How has your behavior plan changed over time?

5. Create a management board and a place to store work station products. Go on a "field trip" to other teachers' rooms to see their management boards and storage ideas.

Extension – What were some innovative ideas that you "picked up" from your colleagues and what "big" ideas did your colleagues borrow from you?

Chapter 3: Classroom Library

Overview

This chapter addresses the all-important role of the classroom library in your classroom, how to set one up so that it is functional and child-friendly, and how students can utilize the library.

Helpful Hints

Remember that time spent at work stations is practice time, and you should not grade everything that your students practice. However, children do need to be held accountable for what they're doing at the classroom library to be sure they are using their time wisely and that they are truly practicing reading and writing.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Is your classroom library inviting to readers? What could you do to make your library more appealing? Ask students for suggestions.

Extension – Discuss what efforts you took to make your classroom library more inviting and which were particularly successful and why?

2. How are the books organized in your classroom library? Develop a plan to improve the setup of your library.

Extension – After sharing your organization ideas with colleagues, which seemed to have worked best for you and your classes?

3. What do you need more of in your classroom library – fiction, nonfiction, magazines other print materials, shelving? Take an inventory.

Extension – After you've inventoried your classroom libraries, what plans and ideas were discussed among your colleagues for the acquisition of additional books, print materials and shelving?

4. What would you like to add to your classroom library – writing materials? An author study? Ask a colleague for suggestions. Use the checklist in Appendix B.

Extension – Have you had the opportunity to add additional materials to your classroom library? What problems are you still experiencing with "growing" your libraries? What do you and your colleagues plan to do about these situations?

5. Observe your students at the classroom library. How independently do they work there? What could you model to help children read more effectively on their own?

Chapter 4: Big Book Work Station

Overview

This chapter delves into Big Book work stations, focusing on how to set up the work station, and what children do there.

Helpful Hints

The Big Book work station is usually one of the most successful stations in the classroom. The amount of time the teacher takes to model how to read Big Books has a direct effect on the quality of the reading practice that children do at this work station. The more the teacher models with Big Books during shared reading, the more successful students are as they practice reading on their own. The clearer and more explicit the teacher, the more children take on reading strategies as their own.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Do children easily and joyfully read Big Books at this station? What could you do to increase the quality of students' reading and writing at this station?

Extension – Did you have a chance to institute changes? Do you think that the changes markedly changed the quality of students' reading and writing at this station? What change worked the best for you and your students?

2. Are students reading with fluency and good expression? What could you model to help them improve in these areas?
3. How are the Big Books organized in your classroom and in your school? Do you have a way of storing Big Books in your room that protects them? Can you easily find Big Books your students can read in the school library?
4. Do you currently have a variety of Big Books available? Count the number of fiction and nonfiction Big Books you have for children to reread. Plan for a balance.

Extension – How does your Big Book collection “stack up” against other teachers' collections on your grade level? Have you tried to share with colleagues to balance your collection and theirs?

5. Plan to make a Big Book with your class. Share ideas and final products with a colleague.
6. Observe your students at the Big Book work station. What are their favorite activities there? Share with a colleague.

Chapter 5: Writing Work Station

Overview

This chapter talks about writing work stations, how to set them up, and even more important, what types of activities your students can do when they are at this station, listing an amazing number of writing work station possibilities.

Helpful Hints

Have your students share their writing with the class during work station sharing time, and ask them what they learned about writing and what they learned about themselves as writers, as the more children become aware of themselves as writers; it will help them to be more accountable. Children who care about their writing do a better job overall.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Where is your writing work station located? Can children easily access the work space from the station? Is it an inviting space that encourages children to do their best, or is it tucked away in an obscure spot where there just happened to be a shelf?

Extension – If you changed the location of your writing work station, share with your colleagues – how did you change it? What happened as a result of the move? Did students’ “published” pieces improve?

2. What can you do to make your writing work station more appealing to students? Look at the writing work stations of several colleagues, perhaps even in different grade levels. What ideas can you borrow and use to add pizzazz to your station?

Extension – Which borrowed ideas paid “dividends?”

3. What helps do you have available for children at the writing work station? What are they using often? What are they using well? What are they not using? What might you change as a result?

Extension – How do you ensure that children know when they need help and seek it?

4. What do children choose to do when they come to the writing work station? Do you observe them mostly talking, writing, drawing, or a combination of these? What can you do to encourage them to do more of any of these behaviors? Do they write mostly fiction or nonfiction? Work with them to expand their writing repertoire.

5. Where do you display children’s writing in your classroom? Do children help select what will be posted? Does everyone write about the same topic, or is a variety of writing displayed? Think about the message this gives to children about the work of writers. Talk about this with a colleague.

6. With permission, visit the classroom of another teacher when he or she is not in the room. Look for evidence of what children are writing about. Jot down what you think that teacher is teaching about writing right now. Have that teacher do the same thing in your room. Then compare notes. Discuss what you can do to better communicate what you are teaching about writing. Remember, what you saw when you visited is what parents see also.

Chapter 6: Drama Work Station

Overview

The drama work station is one that changes throughout the year and looks a bit different from kindergarten through second grade. It is a wonderful place to improve reading comprehension and fluency, as well as to encourage creative expression. Children develop creative expression at this work station, too, as they enact favorite stories and plays.

Helpful Hints

The focus in drama work stations is on reading fluency and comprehension. The more you enable your children read, the better they get at reading. This is also a space where you can encourage oral language as it is related to books.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. How do children's retellings compare with those done earlier in the year? Are children improving in retelling and comprehension throughout the year? How does their retelling of fiction compare with their retelling of nonfiction?

Extension – Share with your colleagues tips that you have employed to help children improve their retellings.

2. Are students reading plays and scripts with good fluency and expression? What could you model to help them improve?
3. Observe your students at the drama station. What do they choose to do most often? What do they do the least? What do you need to add or change to improve the effectiveness of this station?
4. Plan to write a play with your class using a familiar story. Share the resulting ideas and products with a colleague.
5. What are some of your favorite books you've used for retelling? Share them with your colleagues.
6. Are children behaving cooperatively at this station? If so, what have you done to foster those behaviors? Problem-solve with a colleague, if necessary.

Chapter 7: ABC/Word Study Work Station

Overview

The ABC/word study work station is interesting in its diverse nature and the fact that it changes constantly and looks different at various times during the school year. September, children may be working with a magnetic chalkboard, which acts as an interactive word wall, putting an ABC puzzle together, or matching magnetic letters to words printed on cards. A month later, new activities will have been added (perhaps reading ABC books, letter sorts). By January, there will be new words on the word wall and students are sorting them by two-letter words, three-letter words, and so on. By the end of the year, some earlier activities are still being done, but more students are playing work games, such as Concentration or Memory.

Helpful Hints

The ABC/word study station is one that requires much differentiation throughout the school year. Within any classroom, there is a wide range of students' strengths and needs. Be sure to offer choice within this station and add to the materials frequently. However, be careful not to have too many materials here at one time or cleanup may be difficult. To make this station effective all year, be careful to keep it uncluttered.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Where have you placed your ABC/work study work station? Can children easily use the word wall words? How have you made your word wall interactive? If you're having trouble with placement of your work wall or making it interactive, consult a colleague or two for help.
2. How have you organized the ABC/word study work station? Can students easily find the materials they need? Are they returning materials to the proper place? Take a "field trip" to a colleague's classroom to see his or her ABC/word study work station. Share your ideas and observations with each other.
3. Are students interrupting you when they are at the work station? If so, what is the nature of the interruption? Were they arguing? Did they need help with directions? Were materials missing? Reread the section on How to Solve Problems and make changes to this station as needed. Reteach expectations in mini-lessons if necessary.

Extension – Share problems with your group that you have encountered and how you solved them.

4. Observe students to see if they are doing the activities you assigned to them. Use the form in Appendix F as you "eyeball" this station several times during literacy work station time. Try to watch those students who need the most practice to see if they are doing what they should.
5. Do you have a variety of activities for students to choose from at this station? How have you differentiated them? Share your ideas with a colleague.
6. What new word study activities can you introduce to the group as a whole? In a small group setting?
7. How are you keeping records of your students' understanding of letters and words? Do you have a folder or checklist to keep track of phonemic awareness levels, letter identification, and/or spelling patterns that students have mastered? Share your system with a colleague.

8. Are you bogged down in paperwork generated from this station? If so, determine which types of written work best demonstrate what students are learning here. Get rid of extraneous written tasks you may have instituted here in the name of “accountability”

Chapter 8: Poetry Work Station

Overview

The poetry work station is a natural place for children to play with words and enjoy language. Throughout the year, many of the activities will remain the same. What changes is the level and sophistication of the poems.

Helpful Hints

Introduce the poetry station during shared reading. As you read favorite and new poems with children, model the reading strategies you'd like them to practice when they go to the poetry work station. Add new poems over time to keep interest at this station.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Observe several groups of children in your poetry work station. What do they spend most of their time doing? Which activities do they enjoy most? Least? Talk with them about what they are learning in this station. Share your findings with a colleague.
2. Do you enjoy reading poetry? Teaching with poetry? Writing poetry? How is this reflected in what you see happening at the poetry work station?
3. What kinds of poems do your students seem to like best? Who are their favorite poets? Find more poems related to their interests to build enthusiasm for this station. Ask your colleagues to be on the lookout for poems for you.
4. Have a poetry hunting party with your team. Bring your favorite poetry resources and ask them to do the same. Hunt for poems with lots of high-frequency words that your children need for reading and writing. Share with each other.
5. Build a poetry resource notebook of your own. Divide it into sections labeled by topic, such as animals, holidays, sports, plants, back to school, and so forth. Keep copies of favorite poems in here for easy access.

Additionally – Which skills practiced at other work stations do you find are most useful in helping your students to get the most out of the poetry work station?

Chapter 9: Other Work Stations

Overview

This chapter outlines a variety of additional stations and includes ideas on how to add literacy to traditional kindergarten centers. It also speaks about possible problems you might encounter at computer, listening, puzzles and games, buddy reading, overhead, pocket chart, creation, science/social studies, and handwriting work stations and how you might troubleshoot them with your class.

Helpful Hints

You may want to begin with the literacy stations described in the previous chapters and then gradually introduce other stations throughout the school year. Or you might substitute one of the stations described in this chapter, if the materials are more readily available or if the station seems easier for you to implement. The stations suggested here are options for you to consider as you expand this approach to meaningful independent work in your classroom. Choose what works for you.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. What helped you most in this chapter? Which ideas were most useful to you?
2. Which of the work stations from this chapter do you already have in your classroom? What's working well with them? What would you like to change? Discuss your ideas with your group.
3. Which of the work stations in this chapter would you like to add to your classroom? Share several ideas with a colleague. (Keep in mind that this chapter includes more choices than you would probably want to use in your classroom at one time.)
4. How do you schedule students to use the computer in your classroom? How have you maximized computer use? Talk with someone about your ideas.
5. Choose a new work station from this chapter. Work with a partner to plan a mini-lesson for introducing it to your class.
6. If you have (or plan to have) a puzzles and games work station (or substitute a different work station or even a kindergarten center), practice telling another teacher how it supports literacy development at your grade level. Be prepared in case a parent or an administrator asks you this. Always have a rationale for all the activities at literacy work stations and traditional kindergarten centers!
7. Choose any work station from this chapter. Make a "novelty plan" for how to keep it fresh. Remember, you don't have to change everything on Fridays.
8. If you teach kindergarten, discuss ways you have already added literacy to your traditional centers, and share new ideas you plan to try. Visit other kindergarten classrooms and talk with the teachers so that you may help each other increase the opportunities for literacy at centers.

Chapter 10: Planning for Practice at Literacy Work Stations

Overview

This chapter offers and explains various systems for collecting the data necessary to plan for practice at literacy work stations. Included are using a clipboard, running records, looking at writing, establishing a system for collecting data, grading (focusing on practice, not products, and documenting progress for parents.

Helpful Hints

Once you have your stations up and running and have learned to manage them, the question you may ask yourself is “How do I plan literacy work stations that meet the needs of all the students in my class?” The best place to begin planning is to look at what your students already know how to do and then think about what they need next. You can get this information from running records, students’ writing samples, and from anecdotal notes about what children do as readers and writers as you watch them throughout the day.

Reflection and Dialogue

1. Make a clipboard assessment tool with a friend. Challenge each other to use this to gather anecdotal notes on at least several students during the next week or two. You might each choose to observe a low-, a medium-, and a high-performing student in your respective classrooms. Then plan a time to get together again in two weeks and share your notes. Use your observations to plan some work station activities for those particular students.
2. Choose on work station. Observe students there and look for differentiation. Are the needs of each child being met? Which tasks are multi-level? Which are open-ended? What can you change or add to better meet the needs of all students in your classroom at this work station? Share your findings and ideas with a colleague.
3. Gather running records for one of your guided reading groups. You might take a low or a high group to begin (since most teachers tend to teach to the middle). Examine the running records for patterns, using the “Looking at Patterns in Running Records” form. Do this with another teacher and compare notes. Then use the information gleaned to plan for practice at literacy work stations for this group.
4. Likewise, look at a set of writing samples for a group of students. You might use the same group as in the example above. Examine the pieces for patterns and make notes. Then use the information gleaned to plan for practice at literacy work stations. You will probably think of activities for the word study and writing work stations. But you might also consider the listening station if you want to expose students to higher vocabulary or extra models of reading fluency and English language usage.
5. Create a system for collecting data on what students are doing at the literacy work stations. You might use the clipboard assessment method or another way of gathering data, such as eyeballing one work station a day. Share your system with a colleague and compare how it’s going over time.
6. Share with another teacher how you are getting grades during literacy work station time. Support each other by sharing ideas of how to balance grades taken from your observations of students’ processes and products.
7. Talk with other teachers and your administrators about how you’re sharing with parents what students do at the literacy work stations. Show photos taken, anecdotal notes recorded, and products saved. Be proactive!

8. Take notes during work station sharing time and talk about them with a colleague. What did you learn from your dialogue with the children? What changes did you (or will you) make as a result of these conversations?

Appendices

1. Discuss the various appendices with your study group. Which resources, ideas or forms have you had a chance to utilize? Which were most helpful? Did you revise any to fit your own classroom needs? Share these revisions with your colleagues.
2. Did you create new forms based on Debbie Diller's forms? Did you create new forms to meet your specific classroom needs? Share them with your colleagues.



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NYSRRC Book Study Guide Program

Feedback Form

Please provide feedback upon completion of the book study. Return this form in the facilitator guide folder.

1. Was the facilitator's guide useful in leading your discussion of *Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work*? Why or why not?

2. How can we improve this experience?

3. Would you recommend this to other groups?