Establishing Norms for Successful Book Study Discussions

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Essential Question(s)

- What are some norms we can create that will ensure that this book study is a success?
- How should we enforce those norms?

Summary

This activity is part of a series of professional learning activities that can be used to support a group book study. Over the course of this activity, participants collaborate in small groups and create affinity maps that will aid them as they work to establish norms. These norms will be enforced by the group over the course of the book study, and they will play a crucial role in ensuring that collaboration and communication among members of the group is strengthened and that interpersonal conflict is minimized.

Learning Goals

- Participants reflect on instances in which they have collaborated successfully with others as well as when collaboration has been ineffective.
- Participants and presenters collaborate to establish norms that can be used over the course of the book study.
- Participants and presenters determine how these norms can be enforced during the book study.

Attachments

- Session Slides - Establishing Norms pptx.pptx

Materials

- Presentation Slides (attached)
- Two colors of sticky notes (preferably yellow and blue; one set of each per table)
- Pens/pencils
- Computers with Internet access (optional)
- Notebook paper
- Posterboard (optional)

10 minutes

Introduction

Use the attached **Presentation Slides** to guide the session. Begin by displaying **slide 3.** You and your participants will begin the process of establishing norms for your book study by using the 3-2-1 strategy. Explain to the group that each participant will take a piece of notebook paper and respond to the following prompts:

- Write three things you hope to gain from this book study.
- Write two concerns you have about the upcoming book study.
- Write one approach you have for mitigating those concerns.

Give participants at least a couple of minutes to write down their responses. Once participants have indicated they are ready, have them divide into groups of three to six. Tell them that they will have about five minutes to share their responses with their group members.

Have the entire group reconvene and ask a volunteer from each group to share some of the responses they discussed. After each group has shared, explain to the larger group that they will begin the book study by establishing norms that they will adhere to over the course of the study. Display **slides 4** and **5** and take a couple of minutes to go over the essential question and learning objectives with participants.

30 minutes

Activity

Display **slide 6.** Explain to participants that they will be considering ways in which the book study they are working on will be a success. Reflecting on prior instances in which they worked with a group, each participant will begin by taking two yellow sticky notes and writing down on each note a reason why the collaborative endeavor was a success. Then they will take two blue sticky notes and write down on each a pet peeve that they have developed during prior experiences working with groups.

Facilitator's Note: Distributing the Sticky Notes

Depending on the number of participants in each group, you will want to adjust the number of sticky notes used in this activity. If you decide to divide your participants into groups of more than four, instruct each person to write down successes and pet peeves on two or three sticky notes total. If you decide to divide everyone into groups of four or less, let participants know that they can each use four or five sticky notes to write down their successes and pet peeves. Make sure to only use two colors of sticky notes for each category (e.g., yellow for successes and blue for pet peeves).

Display **slide 7.** Tell the participants that they will use the sticky notes they have written on for an Affinity Process activity. Explain that by organizing the sticky notes into clusters, they can get a better sense of the factors that need to be considered when establishing norms for the book study.

Explain that groups will now work to develop a comprehensive affinity map that breaks down the successes and pet peeves into additional categories. In order to do this, have participants remain in their small groups. Make sure that each group uses a flat surface (either a tabletop or an adjacent bulletin board) on which they arrange their sticky notes. Give groups about five minutes to arrange and categorize their sticky notes. Reassure participants that the categories do not necessarily have to be clear-cut in this early phase of the activity, but they should try to identify at least some broad categories into which the successes and pet peeves can be grouped.

Display **slide 8.** After groups have categorized the sticky notes, instruct them to spend an additional five minutes reviewing their clusters and discussing what they see. Ask them to justify their reasons for placing the sticky notes into various categories and to consider whether they think the manner in which they have organized their sticky notes makes sense. If they decide the sticky notes need to be rearranged, this will be an opportunity for them to do that.

Display **slide 9.** Once groups have finished discussing and reorganizing their sticky notes, tell participants that each group will have another five minutes to use their affinity maps to come up with three to five norms that they will write on sticky notes and share with the larger group. Groups will create these norms by considering the successes and pet peeves that they had previously discussed.

Display **slide 10.** After groups have developed their norms, have the entire book study group reconvene. Instruct the groups to place the sticky notes listing their norms on a bulletin board or wall. Give participants a few minutes to read carefully through the sticky notes and search for similarities between some of the norms. Once they have done so, ask them if they are happy with the categories that have been created, or if further merging of the notes will be required. Encourage participants to move the sticky notes around as they see fit, but make sure that the rest of the group agrees with their decision before they do so. Allow at least five more minutes for this process.

Display **slide 11.** Invite participants to take a closer look at the affinity map. Ask participants if they are satisfied by the way in which they have organized the proposed norms. Once the entire group has indicated that they approve of the design of the affinity map, let them know that they will be using this map as a reference as they work to establish the norms for the book study.

10 minutes

Wrap-up

Facilitator's Note: Dividing the Participants

In this last part of the activity, participants will work to establish the norms for the book study. If the book study group consists of more than 16, consider breaking them up into groups of three or four. After about 15 minutes of discussion, the groups could reconvene to discuss the norms they have proposed. If the book study group consists of 15 people or fewer, the norms could be established by the entire group.

Display **slide 12.** In either small groups or as an entire group, devote 15 minutes to proposing norms that will be adopted by the book study group. Remind participants to keep in mind the successes, pet peeves, and categories that were discussed in the previous activity. If participants are meeting in small groups, encourage each group to come up with three to five norms. For these norms, each group will also need to decide on verbal or visual cues that could be used to determine whether these norms are ever broken by members of the group. Move to **slides 13** and **14** to provide participants with examples of these cues.

Examples of Cues

Participants have a lot of flexibility when deciding on cues, but you may want to provide them with examples of visual and verbal cues to help guide them through the process. Possible cues include:

Visual:

- Someone holds up a stuffed animal.

Verbal

- Someone utters an agreed-upon word.
- A participant politely asks someone about a norm in question.
- Group members discuss the norm outside of the meeting with the leader of the group.

If participants have been in groups, they will reconvene after 15 minutes as an entire group. If you have been working as an entire group for that time, you can continue with the process of deciding on norms. As an entire group, you will work to agree on which norms should be adopted by the group and how you will determine whether these norms have been broken. You will also need to decide as an entire group how you plan to move forward if a norm has been broken.

After 25-30 minutes of discussion, ask participants if they are satisfied with the norms, cues, and penalties/recommended courses of action that they have decided on. If everyone is in agreement, ask participants whether they would prefer writing these on a poster that could be displayed at each meeting of the book study, or whether it would be better to simply review them at the start of each meeting.

Research Rationale

Research advocates for professional learning initiatives aligning with adult learning principles, such as those proposed by Lawler and King (2000), including creating respectful climates, encouraging active participation, building on experiences, employing collaborative inquiry, focusing on actionable learning, and empowering participants.

Within this realm, book studies emerge as potent vehicles for professional learning. Stover and Elston (2020) emphasized that extended-duration book studies enable educators to assimilate content, connect it to their teaching environment, and foster collaborative learning communities. Insights from Blanton et al. (2021) and Stover and Elston (2020) coalesce, underscoring how book studies promote a culture of sharing experiences, reflection, and collective sense-making. Successful book study experiences were characterized by voluntary participation, different material choices, active learning of new strategies, equal participation within trust-filled groups, and extended timeframes.

Resources

- Blanton, B. S., Broemmel, A. D., & Rigell, A. (2020). Speaking volumes: Professional development through book studies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *57*(3), 1014-1044. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831219867327
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Affinity process. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/87
- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117
- Lawler, Patricia A. and King, Kathleen P. (2000). "Refocusing Faculty Development: The View from an Adult Learning Perspective," Adult Education Research Conference. https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2187&context=aerc
- Stover, S., & Elston, A. E. (2021). An Online Book Study Approach to P-12 Teachers' Professional Learning Experience. *Adaptive and Responsive Educational Renewal*, 93.