

# Not Your Average Book Club - Teacher Readers Make Teacher Leaders

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

The process of my action research began to take shape after reading a tweet during our IPLI Mini-AR Cycle. The tweet stated that the average CEO reads 60 books per year. This made me think about the amount of time I spend reading and the number of books I read in a year. As a principal, I questioned whether I could be considered the CEO of my building and began to further question the idea of teacher leaders and how many books teachers in my building were reading. I decided, that regardless of titles, we are all leaders in our building and classrooms in some capacity. Based on some initial feedback from teachers and staff, I knew as a building, we needed to read more. Therefore, I wondered - How much better could we be if we all read more? I have many first year teachers and teachers new to our district because of much needed staffing changes. We replaced over 80% of our teachers from the previous year. With the new staff, I knew it was going to be important to create a work environment where time was valued, people are valued and ideas are valued. We needed to get back to the basics and I wanted teachers to remember why they got started in education and to start having fun again while teaching. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to provide voluntary professional development to teachers, by starting a Book Club, in an effort to shift the climate and culture of our building while building capacity for teacher leaders.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered how a book club, as a method of voluntary professional development, could influence the culture and climate of my building.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insight into my wondering, I invited teachers to join a voluntary book club and commit to reading and discussing the books we had selected. The club then met on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month and had no agenda for where the discussion would go. We simply discussed and documented what we loved and what we learned from the assigned section of reading and talked at length about how our ideas could impact teaching and learning in our classrooms and school.

The group started by reading and discussing "What Great Teachers Do Differently". We then moved onto reading "Teach Like a Pirate" and "Empower".

Each meeting we discussed what we loved, learned or took away from the reading (usually 25-30 pages) and then talked about how we can bring those ideas back to our school or classroom. We tried to keep the reading small so it did not become "one more thing" our group needs to do in an effort to keep the reading enjoyable and not just another arduous task. We kept the club voluntary so no one is obligated to attend and was designed as a voluntary method of professional development.

Each session we documented our discussion using the "What, So What Method" to capture our thoughts and to provide notes for the group. We also utilized sign-in sheets, newsletters to share our thoughts with the

entire staff, and a survey to gain feedback from book club members on the process and overall experience of book club. Through the use of classroom observations, I was also able to witness and document many of the ideas we discussed being tried and implemented in classrooms by book club teachers.

During the second semester, the book club also lead a school wide professional development series on the book "What Great Teachers Do Differently" and was something they created on their own. This allowed book club teachers to form small reading circles to discuss small sections of the book once a month using a similar format to what had been done in book club. We would then join as a large group the next week to do a follow-up session on how items discussed could be carried over to the classroom or school. This proved to be a very worthwhile professional development series as it generated discussions which prompted collaboration, creativity and ways to improve instruction.

### **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my data, important things I learned include:

- 1) As a result of analyzing my data, I quickly realized that my teachers are thirsty for knowledge and want to learn more about teaching. My staff is full of Rock Stars, are really good at what they do and love having the freedom to teach and try new things without dealing with the pressure and fear of failing;
- 2) Being voluntary, professional development was more engaging because people wanted to be there and wanted to share ideas. Our discussions prompted collaboration, creativity, and focused on ways to improve instruction, delivery, and teaching;
- 3) Book Club has had a powerful impact on the culture and climate of our building and this grass roots project is just getting started. Teachers are already planning projects for next year, suggesting books to read and are looking forward to where this voluntary professional development opportunity might take us.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

The grass roots effort to provide voluntary professional development in the form of a book club for staff quickly developed into an experience I never imagined. From the start, more than half of the teachers in my building attended book club discussions and were a part of very powerful and moving conversations. The dialog generated action and not only impacted teaching and learning through instruction and teacher practice, the book club also lead a staff wide book study, developed a mentor program for new teachers, and engaged in valuable reflection through the lens of professional reading material focused on making educators masters of the craft and leaders in the field.

As we wrapped up book club for the year, member teachers were provided a survey as I attempted to gather feedback regarding our first book club. Responses to survey questions provided resounding support of our book club and gave feedback to ways in which our voluntary club made major strides to transforming the climate and culture of our building. Teachers began making plans for next year's club, researching potential books to read, and looking for ways to incorporate thoughts and ideas which were discussed during our time in book club.

By the end of the year, book club provided a breath of fresh air for teachers and provided a platform to share ideas, discuss talking points brought up by the reading, and reflect on personal practice as an educator. The feedback provided showed overwhelming support of book club and gave us additional direction moving

forward. In the coming year, we look forward to the addition of new members, as other teachers have voiced interest in reading along with us, which would increase our participation to between 70-80% of our staff. This tells me that we are doing something right and people want to be a part of it.

This voluntary book club started as a way for teachers to increase their capacity of learning and provide a way to collaborate, discuss and share has become something much bigger and more powerful than I initially imagined. A simple tweet about how many books the average CEO reads per year, sparked an idea that we need to read more as educators, that I need to read more as a leader and that by reading more we could build stronger teachers, while providing professional development in which teachers were personally vested. The positive impact the book club has had on our building has been refreshing. We are looking forward to see how it grows from here and where our reading, conversations and shared ideas take us.

### **References:**

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