**"Teacher Book Talks" As a Professional Development Tool**

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**Each week, *Instant Meeting* presents an idea or activity that you might use to make staff meetings more interesting, teacher-centered, educational, or fun.**

Brief Description/Purpose

Teachers in many schools are gathering in groups large and small to read, discuss, reflect on, and learn from books that open their eyes to inspiration and new teaching strategies.

Materials Needed

* individual copies of books to be discussed

Time Required

Book Talks can be done as whole-staff activities. More often, however, small groups of teachers set aside time to read, discuss, and learn from books that challenge them to develop new strategies and ideas for improving student learning.

"Instant Meeting" Idea

Leading the professional development of teachers is one of the greatest challenges school administrators face. Because teachers put so much energy into teaching every day, they often don't find time to imagine their work in a larger context. That's why principal Jim Thompson launched a Book Talk program at Wolcott Street School in LeRoy, New York.

One of the first books Thompson used was

* *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson. "Public education in New York State has been a constant sea of change with the addition of high-stakes assessments and new learning standards for every curriculum," explained Thompson. In talking about that book, "we helped everyone come to grips with the reality [of change] that the cheese had moved. Then we asked ourselves 'How does this apply to the way we look at teaching?' and, most important, 'How does this apply to learning and learners?'

Among Jim Thompson's tips for using Book Talks: In every discussion, focus on how to infuse actual classroom teaching with the book's message. Be sure each book enriches the teachers' teaching and supports their primary mission of making a difference with each and every kid, each and every day.

Jim Maginn works at the Genesee Valley Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), a support organization for 22 districts, including Wolcott Street School's school district. He has worked with Jim Thompson in various areas of educational support for a number of years. "One of our most successful initiatives is the use of Book Talk as a method of professional development," Maginn told Education World. "This is a very inexpensive, enjoyable, and effective form of professional development used to introduce the staff to a particular topic or issue.

"The formats involve and stimulate the participants, and use very little lecturing. The participants get the book ahead of time, and keep the book after the session to be used for follow-up activities and reference."

The books below offer a sampling of Book Talk books that the teachers at Wolcott Street School have read:

* *The Passionate Teacher and The Passionate Learner* by Robert Fried
* *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman
* *How Reading Changed My Life* by Anna Quindlen
* *How to Catch a Shark and Other Stories About Teaching and Learning* by Don Graves
* *Ordinary Resurrections* by Jonathan Kozol
* *Bringing Out the Genius in the Classroom* by Tom Armstrong
* *Fish! Tales* by Stephen Lundin
* *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8* by Ralph Fletcher and Joann Portalupi
* *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom
* *Educating for Character* by Tom Lickona
* *The Teaching Gap* by James W. Stigler and James Hiebert

Read More

[Principal Uses "Book Talk" to Engage Teachers as Learners](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin248.shtml) (EducationWorld.com -- June 24, 2002)

[Study Groups and Teacher Book Circles](http://www.middleweb.com/MWLISTCONT/MSLstudygrps.html) (MiddleWeb listserv)

[Join the Club!](http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/jointheclub.htm) (*Scholastic Instructor)*

Follow-Up

If small groups of teachers study a variety of books, it might be good idea to give each group 5 minutes at a staff meeting to summarize what they have learned. That summary might challenge other teachers to tackle the book or motivate individual teachers to read the book in their spare time or over summer break.

If staff meeting time is too tight to set aside time for teachers to present their summaries, each Book Talk or book-study group might provide a written summary paragraph. You can include that summary paragraph in your weekly staff memo.