UNMAPPED
Potential

Book Study Guide

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A book study is a powerful vehicle for connecting with colleagues. In a profession where we can easily become isolated and disengaged, conversations around a book recharge our passion and professional efficacy. These conversations can bring meaningful change to the practices of teaching and leading. There are a million ways to structure a book study, but ensuring trust and equity in a climate where ideas are freely shared is a must.

In planning for a book study, the first consideration is group size. Groups can range from two people to a dozen, but a group of four to six is ideal. The group should be small enough to ensure that all members' ideas can be heard. If group members do not know each other well, take the time to build familiarity before beginning the book discussion.

Among the first tasks for the group are assigning roles and developing norms. Groups need a facilitator who will run the meetings and keep the group on track. However,

this facilitator should be a co-learner, rather than a leader. Norms that will govern the group's work should be established at the first meeting and monitored throughout the study. Below are examples of norms:

- We will start and end on time
- All members will participate fully
- All members will come prepared
- We will disagree with ideas, not individuals
- We will keep our conversations confidential

In addition to the facilitator, the group will need a note taker to keep a journal, archiving the group's work. Keeping the journal in a file that can be shared (Dropbox, Google Drive or the internal school network) allows all members to revisit the discussions. This also allows group members to share ideas with the group outside of meetings.

A clarified or enriched understanding is a natural outcome for a book study participant. In addition, an action plan created by each individual participant ensures that learning from the reading and discussions translates into changes in practice. After all, information alone never leads to transformation, lasting change requires both reflection and action.

We set up this guide with a brief summary of each chapter followed by discussion questions and group activities. However, you may also incorporate your own questions, discussion starters and protocol. We have shared a few of our favorites at the end of this document.

Book study comrades make great traveling companions on your map changing journey. They help you to consider new ideas and different perspectives. They also validate your own thoughts and feelings with a collective *me too,* proving that you are not traveling alone. We wish you well in this endeavor; know that we are cheering you on.

Please share your thoughts and experiences throughout the book study using the #UnmappedEd hashtag.

CHAPTER 1

Your Map Matters

We are all guided by our own maps as we navigate the world. All our beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about how the world works are represented in the maps we have created in our minds, our *mental maps*. Because the beliefs on our maps can empower us or limit us, the place to start in the journey toward personal or professional improvement is to take out your map, unfold it and examine it.

Every outcome you experience begins with a single thought. If that thought sticks around long enough, it becomes a belief. That belief either leads to an action or prevents you from acting. Repeated behaviors (actions or inactions) become habits, and habits draw things into your life or keep them out. Unfortunately, most people move through life unaware of the mental maps that guide their thoughts, influence their choices and create their outcomes.

Maybe some of your beliefs aren't serving you (or your students well). If so, it's time to revise your map. Doing so can be uncomfortable and challenging, but it's the only way to get from where you currently are to where you want to be.

Discussion Questions

Why is it so challenging to cultivate awareness of patterns and beliefs in a school?

What do you currently communicate about your map to those you teach and lead?

When have you experienced the contrast of your map with someone else's map?

What schoolwide goal(s) might be hindered by limiting beliefs?

What could you revise, add or eliminate to create a map leading to the schoolwide outcomes you envision?

Group Activities

Create a timeline of major events that have happened in your school or community. Discuss how these events have impacted the culture and practices of your school.

Give each group member a blank sheet of paper. Allow members 5-10 minutes to sketch a representation of their vision for the school. Discuss each member's vision and how maps might need to change to realize the vision.

CHAPTER 2

A Change-Savvy Map

As an educator, your work is ever changing – new students, new schedules, new curriculum, new policies and countless other new elements. Changes can occur simultaneously and rapidly. You may not be able to control all of them and the challenges they bring, but you can always control your response to change.

Any change can be challenging because it requires you to leave your comfort zone. Your comfort zone is a fear-based state designed to keep you safely locked in your current reality. Breaking out of a rut allows you to move into your potential zone. Your potential zone is a proactive state where you proactively change your map and create the reality you envision.

Chances are that you have a patterned way of responding to unexpected challenges. Your response largely determines how smoothly you will navigate the new landscape. In fact, the filter of your own perspective may be making the landscape itself appear more dismal than it actually is. The words you use (out loud or in your head) to frame a change or a challenging situation impact the outcome.

Practicing flexibility helps you to think about problems in a new ways, consider multiple perspectives, and generate possible solutions. Embrace change when it is needed, and make that change with purpose and a positive frame.

Discussion Questions

What recent changes have been made at your school? How have you responded?

How can you frame the challenges you experience in your school in more optimistic and empowering ways?

Are there practices or routines in your school that exist just because *that's the way you've always done it*?

How could you add some flexibility or novelty to your daily routine to benefit both staff and students?

Group Activities

Routines and procedures help your school operate efficiently, but shaking things up once in a while builds flexible thinking in educators and students. Make a list of five to ten ways that you could add some flexibility or novelty to your routine.

Pay attention to how you are framing challenges. As a group, set a timer for ten minutes while you practice talking about a current challenge in ways that are optimistic and empowering.

CHAPTER 3

Choice or Chance

Whether you believe that you can change things for the better or you believe that your circumstances dictate your results, your beliefs have an undeniable impact on your outcomes. If you tend to rely on an internal locus of control, you believe your own behavior determines your outcomes and, with effort, you can improve your situation. If you regularly use an external locus of control, you attribute outcomes to luck, fate or the power of others.

To experience success, you need positive outcome expectations and positive efficacy expectations. An outcome expectation is simply the belief that a certain behavior will produce a certain outcome. An efficacy expectation is the belief that you can effectively perform the behavior required to produce the outcome. If you believe that all kids can learn and you believe that you have the ability to teach all kids, you will rock in the classroom!

The brain loves patterns, and it is routinely categorizing, labeling and comparing. One way to categorize is to quickly sort things into two categories- *Me* and *Not Me*. It is difficult to achieve a goal if you place

anything related to that goal into the *Not Me* category. Like categorizing, labeling is a way to categorize yourself and others, which often places limits on potential.

Your success largely depends upon your confidence because it directly impacts your performance. Confidence breeds competence, and competence breeds confidence. In other words, your expectations of student performance are largely related to your belief in your own ability to teach or lead.

The only way to consistently realize the outcomes you desire is to take responsibility. Attributing your outcomes to chance, luck or outside influences provides an excuse for not trying. If your map is leading you to resist taking ownership and action, it is time to revise your map.

Discussion Questions

Think of your successes as a school. Did they happen by chance or because of choices?

As a faculty, are you spending more energy on things inside or outside of your control?

How can you collectively grow in confidence? How will this impact your performance and competence?

As a faculty, what do you automatically place in the categories, *Us* and *Not Us*?

How might labels impact your outcomes and your students' success?

How can you take more ownership for your outcomes?

Group Activities

Draw two large circles on a piece of chart paper, one inside the other. In the large outer circle, list schoolwide challenges over which you have no control. In the inner circle, list the schoolwide challenges which you can impact. Cut the circles apart. Get rid of the outer circle (the things you cannot control). Instead, focus on the things in the inner circle (those that you can impact). Choose one or two worthy of your time and effort, and make a plan to address/improve those areas.

Refer to your list of challenges in the inner circle (those that you can impact) from the activity above. Discuss who has ownership of each of those challenges. Is it the whole faculty? A team? Administrators? Students? Discuss ways your group members can take some responsibility in each of the items listed.

CHAPTER 4

Mapping Challenges as Opportunities

Sometimes the biggest problem we (and our students) have is that we don't think we should have any problems. But we acquire the greatest learning—the kind we internalize and apply in different contexts—when things are hard.

With some biological exceptions, such as height or shoe size, we can improve almost all personal qualities with time and effort. We may have different starting points, but *we* determine our ending points. Psychologist and researcher Carol Dweck calls this a "growth mindset." People using a growth mindset are focused on learning and growing. They know perseverance leads to progress. Consider this formula for success:

$$Ability \times Effort = Success$$

The less ability or inherent aptitude you have, the more effort you must apply. A growth mindset doesn't ignore differences in inherent aptitude, but those different starting points are unrelated to the ending

point. What determines your success is your own willingness to do the work.

We all make mistakes and experience setbacks. Those are just detours, not roadblocks. When you try to avoid the struggle of a challenge or escape the consequences of a mistake, you cheat yourself out of an opportunity to grow.

Discussion Questions

How can you foster an environment where mistakes and challenges are embraced rather than avoided?

How can you lessen the focus on comparisons and focus on individual growth and progress instead?

How do the adults at your school model a growth mindset for students?

How do you respond to feedback or criticism as a team or school?

Group Activities

Brainstorm ways to celebrate mistakes, the kind of mistakes that lead to growth. Consider giving teachers and students opportunities to share a mistake and how it lead to greater understanding or learning. For example,

you could create a "great mistakes" bulletin board or a segment on the morning show.

Think about how you currently set goals with teachers and students. Develop a plan for tracking and celebrating individual progress toward important goals.

CHAPTER 5

Your Map Impacts Others

At any given moment, you can be an energy *boost* (cultivating positivity and passion that refreshes and renews others) or an energy *drain* (unloading negativity and angst, and literally sucking the life out of a room). Pay attention to the energy you bring into your classroom and school each day.

Your beliefs about others largely determine how you interact with them, and the way you interact with others – and make them feel – largely determines how they respond to you. You cannot fake warm regard and caring; your subtleties will always give you away. If you pay attention, you will see that others are always giving you cues about the signals you are sending.

Your struggle to connect with some people is likely rooted in your thoughts about them. Chances are, you think about them as problems to be managed rather than people with needs as important as your own. Conflict can also arise from the patterns you have developed to protect your ego.

When you understand that people act on the outside the way they feel on the inside, it is easier to be patient with them.

Discussion Questions

What kind of energy permeates your school each day?

How can you spread more positive energy and passion?

Where do the energy drains tend to pop up? How can you lessen the impact?

In what ways can you invest in better relationships with colleagues?

In what ways can you invest in better relationships with students?

Group Activities

Identify places or situations in your school where negative energy tends to reside. Does it creep into the teachers' lounge or the bus ramp? Create some norms for these spaces and share them.

Create and post signs around the campus with messages like: *Take responsibility for the energy you bring into this space*.

CHAPTER 6

Prospecting for Potential

One thing is certain about beliefs and expectations: you find what you look for. If you look for problems and deficits in your students, you will find them. If you look for gifts and strengths, you will find them. Thanks to an overabundance of data, we know more about the deficits and strengths of our students than we ever did before. But why do we immediately zoom in on the weaknesses? This laser-like focus on remediation seems to drive many of our current policies and practices. But perhaps we are misusing data in a very important way. You see, data only shows where a student was at *one point in time*. Data cannot possibly paint a picture of what the student will be in the future.

Students dealing with adversity have big potential for growth. Their challenges can become opportunities for greater wisdom and resilience, but they need help framing them this way. Building upon their strengths boosts students' confidence, engages them in learning, and maximizes growth. Students' academic achievement and emotional well-being significantly impact one another. Many students have considerable needs to address, but those are not the primary focus in a

strengths-based classroom or school. Instead, remediation happens in the context of relevant and challenging work.

We must believe in the unlimited potential of our students—regardless of the neighborhoods or families they come from and regardless of their past performance. And we must communicate our belief through our words, actions, instructional decisions, and daily practices. Students are sophisticated observers, constantly making interpretations about our expectations and beliefs. Let's provide challenge in the context of care and support. Let's treat all students as if they are gifted—because they are.

Discussion Questions

What do you know about the strengths and gifts of your students?

How do you currently identify and build upon students' strengths?

What forms of evidence (besides test scores) can indicate students' abilities?

What do the current instructional practices at your school communicate to students about your expectations?

Group Activities

You've heard about people going through life wearing rose-colored glasses. What if you entered your school or classroom each day wearing "strengths finder" goggles? What you look for, you will find; so why not look for the good in others? To spot their strengths, look for moments when they are excited about what they are saying or doing. Take mental notes about what makes those you teach and lead come alive. Share what you find at your next book study group meeting.

CHAPTER 7

Motivation on the Map

In order to maximize student learning, both teacher efficacy and student efficacy must exist. Efficacy is comprised of two parts: the belief an outcome is possible and the belief one has the capacity (given enough time and practice) to achieve the outcome. Confidence covers the second part. As our students grow in confidence, they will also grow in competence. The same is true for us. As we strengthen our belief in our own abilities, we will become better teachers and leaders.

Confidence is mainly informed by past successes. So students who don't have a history of academic success often feel insecure. You can help students develop self-confidence by allowing them to experience a sense of accomplishment through carefully sequencing and scaffolding tasks meant to improve their skills. When students have little or no experience in an area, your modeling can give them a starting point. Watching you demonstrate, while explicitly describing the necessary steps, helps students think about their own abilities in relation to the task. Relating new content or an unfamiliar task to something they already know can also give students the initial boost they need.

Modeling, scaffolding, guiding, and accommodating students until their skills are strengthened enhances confidence. But beware of over-helping. Self-confidence only grows when students perceive tasks as challenging and when they complete these tasks with some degree of independence. Extremely easy tasks, or ones done with too much assistance, yield no confidence gains.

The impact of teacher confidence can't be ignored. Many of the students we talked to based their predictions for success on their assessment of teacher confidence. When a teacher is confident in his or her ability, students have higher expectations for their own learning. Educators grow in confidence the same way students do— by experiencing success. Set a challenging goal for yourself and find a way to monitor your progress. Enlist a colleague who can give you specific performance feedback. Then celebrate small victories on the road to reaching your goal.

Discussion Questions

How do you help students grow in both confidence and competence?

How does the level of teacher and leader confidence impact students at your school?

How do you recognize and celebrate achievements so that you can remember them when confidence is needed?

How do you help colleagues (especially new teachers) grow in both confidence and competence?

Group Activities

Talk about your past successes as a school or team. Reflect on ways you can use these successes to grow in confidence and competence.

Confidence is built on accomplishments; so recognizing and remembering your achievements is key to greater confidence. Create a space that you can fill with reminders of your team's or your school's successes. If you have pictures, medals, or newspaper articles, display them. If there are notes of thanks from students or families, post them. A "brag board" of your graduates is a great reminder of your success. Periodically, revisit the display — especially when you (or your students) need a confidence boost.

CHAPTER 8

Collaboration is the Key

Putting educators on a team or forming a committee is not a complete solution to any problem. Teams are a vehicle to reach an outcome — a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The outcome, or common purpose, is the driving force. But throwing people together and hoping they will work productively is ineffective. Collaborative teams are not just formed; they are built over time in the context of their work. The work of collaboration requires a great deal of time and commitment as teams continuously plan, take action, and reflect on their impact.

Collaboration cannot be mandated; it is ultimately a voluntary process. Team members must believe collaboration allows them to achieve bigger outcomes than they can accomplish individually. They must also believe in the benefits of diverse skill sets and perspectives. These beliefs, plus commitment to the common purpose, are essential characteristics of team members. When it comes to building teams, commitment and willingness always trump knowledge and skill.

When teachers trust one another and collaborate, they ultimately have a greater positive impact on students than

could have been realized by teachers working independently. Collaboration enhances problem-solving because of the diversity of solutions proposed. If you work on a team with only likeminded people, you are apt to come up with the same solution you would have found on your own. And others bring complementary strengths that enhance your skills. True teamwork is an active, inclusive, and participatory process. Collaboration turns our individual powers into super powers.

Discussion Questions

How much collaboration is currently happening at your school?

What could your school gain through more collaboration?

How could your students benefit from the collaboration of their teachers and leaders?

What are the obstacles to collaboration at your school and how can you overcome those obstacles?

Group Activities

Create a list of tasks that teachers currently do independently but could be more impactful if done collaboratively.

Collaborating is about knowing and tapping into others' strengths when you need answers and assistance. It is built on knowing your colleagues and trusting their character and competence. Create a map of "colleague capital," a simple table showing your colleagues' or team members' unique strengths, skills, or knowledge. Once completed, take a step back and admire the collective brilliance in your school. Use this map as a resource when collaboration is needed.

CHAPTER 9

Traveling within the System

When you understand the philosophy and beliefs behind a resource or strategy and you know what you believe about teaching and learning, you can ensure authenticity. In other words, never do anything just because everybody else is doing it. While many pedagogical techniques have been shown to correlate with greater learning, they don't all work for all teachers and all students. And effective educators who adopt a new strategy likely will tweak it a bit to better fit their own style. Great teachers have many different teaching styles, but they are always authentic. Be bold and be innovative; but always be you.

If lasting reform is to take hold in a school, it will come from within. The best solutions come from a familiarity with the unique context of a school and an intimate knowledge of its purpose. Teaching and learning is complex and dynamic; we cannot fully capture its overall effectiveness with a single score on an annual test. Unfortunately, the availability and efficiency of test scores make them very attractive. Scores, however, are only a small representation of a bigger story. They ignore the human characteristics and unique circumstances of

students; and an overreliance on test scores leads to systematized, standardized, and homogenized practices.

We should allow data to inform us, but not drive us. It is a useful tool, but never an end in itself. Data only tells us where we are right now and has absolutely no bearing on where we end up. However, data can be empowering when used correctly. When we use data to accurately assess where we are, and we know where we want to go, we can use the data to make a plan for getting there.

Resilient teachers keep things in perspective and gain energy through networking with colleagues inside and outside their schools. They share both professional resources and emotional support. They encourage one another to find a balance between their work and personal lives. In a bubble of connection, we find strength in numbers and power to withstand a host of outside pressures.

Discussion Questions

How do the practices and strategies evident in your school align with your school's vision and mission?

How can you celebrate the unique individuals at your school while nurturing a common purpose?

How can you support each other in ways that boost resilience and reduce burn out?

How does the well-being of teachers and leaders impact students?

Group Activities

When planning professional development opportunities for your team or school, consider ways to foster wellness and well-being in addition to increasing instructional effectiveness. Could you offer a session on mindfulness? Could you start a walking group? Brainstorm a list of these opportunities.

CHAPTER 10

You Never Really Get There

Progress doesn't usually happen in a neat, linear way. We don't go straight from point A to point B. At times, we take one step forward and two steps back. So give yourself a break when you go off course. Challenges and obstacles are always on the road to lasting change, and mistakes are evidence you are trying something new. Feeling happy and satisfied when things are going well is easy, but staying positive when difficulties and setbacks come around is more challenging. Sometimes difficulties arise as the result of your choices; other times they are a result of things beyond your control. Remember… you may not be able to prevent a problem, but you can always choose your response.

There are many reasons for embarking on this map-changing journey, but perhaps the best reason is you cannot expect your students to go where you are not willing to go. You can't expect students to believe in their limitless potential if you hold limiting beliefs about your own. You can't expect students to do what it takes to grow in competence and confidence when you aren't doing the work personally. You can't expect students to take risks and embrace mistakes if you don't. You can't

expect students to be engaged and passionate if you are worn out and weary. After all, you weren't meant to live a perfect life; you were meant to live a purposeful life.

Create a powerful vision of the educator you want to be. Assess where you are compared to your vision. Does your current map hold beliefs and patterns to help you reach your goal? If not, your map is not serving you well. Every map eventually becomes outdated and needs revision from time to time. Revise your map and plan a route to get from where you are to where you want to be. Don't worry if you go off course—just make a U-turn and get back on track. Take bold steps in the direction of your dreams.

Discussion Questions

What is your vision for the school you would like to be?

How is your vision different from where you are right now?

What do you need to do to get from here to there?

What will you (and your students) gain by moving in the direction of your goal?

Group Activities

Think about your collective purpose as a school, the WHY behind your work. Generate some strategies for keeping that WHY in mind each day. Let that WHY drive your decisions and practices.

Revisit your vision sketches from Chapter 1. Reflect on anything you would add or change as you merge your individual visions into a powerful, collective vision for your school. Reflect on how you will work together to make this vision a reality.

Extension

A book study is a great way to build collective capacity and create a common understanding. Below are some questions you can use with almost any book. We hope you have enjoyed the study of Unmapped Potential, and we wish you happy reading and collaborating!

Why do you think the authors chose the title? If you had to rename the book, what would you call it?

Which chapter resonated with you most? Why?

Which quotes spoke to you personally? Why?

How have your thoughts or views changed as a result of reading this book?

What would you like to see in a sequel to the book?

Please share your thoughts and experiences using the #UnmappedEd hashtag.