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Book Study:
Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives
by Peter Johnston

Sample Pages

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Table of Contents

Course Overview

Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives (2012) by Peter Johnston, describes the power of a dialogic classroom where students are actively engaged in productive talk through the language of dynamic learning – the language that focuses on "the more you know, the smarter you get." The principles of dynamic learning can be applied immediately to any content area, any curriculum, K-12 and to any social setting. The results are powerful, immediate and supported by research. Read and apply the simple words and phrases that center on the process of *learning* rather than the traits of the *learner.* Notice how students light up as their thinking and perceptions are valued, and recognize that what they do and have to say is important to the learning community of the classroom and beyond. Learn how to shape students' learning, that opens their minds to possibility, builds self-esteem, and social consciousness. Discover how "Sometimes a single word changes everything."(2)

This book study gives you the opportunity to read and apply the language of dynamic learning and evaluate how using the language of process and effort changes the learning behaviors of students in your classroom. It will impact you, too! Applying the strategies starts with Chapter 1 of *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives,* as you read examples of other teachers and how they use language to promote active engagement. Study the teacher moves. Imitate them in your classroom or social setting. Learn the belief system, the foundation block for dynamic learning that centers on the process of learning, and quickly generates the belief that anybody can learn. Learning is not dependent on fixed traits, but rather attitude and effort. Challenges are just hard work, and usually have a rewarding pay off, and mistakes are valued as opportunities to problem solve another way. Pay particular attention to the efficacy of feedback versus praise and notice how language that focuses on process and causality empowers students to take ownership of their learning. Build collaborative problem solving strategies guiding students to think together and work together welcoming divergence of opinion and thought, to build "social imagination" the basis for point of view, perspective and empathy.

Though this is a relatively short book, and could be read in several hours, it is also the kind of text that continues to yield insights and ideas from multiple readings, As Lori Sabo aptly says in a post on The Daily Café, "Because of the rich and thought-provoking content, it is the kind of book that begs to be reread. Each time I read it, I adopt another phrase to add to my default repertoire that will help me foster a classroom that is emotionally healthy and a vibrant learning community."
http://www.thedailycafe.com/public/2633

The theory of dynamic learning mindset that sets the framework for *Opening Minds* is intellectually interesting, but the power of the content is in its application to social

learning and classroom practice. Move from an asymmetrical classroom where the teacher is the sole authority and the most responsible for the learning environment (monologic classroom) to a symmetrically powered classroom where students are engaged in productive talk becoming equally learners and teachers (dialogic classroom).

"Teaching is planned opportunism. We have an idea of what we want to teach children, and we plan ways to make that learning possible. When we put our plan into action, children offer us opportunities to say something, or not and the choices we make affect what happens next." (4)

An interesting shift of energy happens in a dialogic classroom. Productive talk allows the work of learning to shift to student responsibility and their collaborative efforts, creating more active student engagement and participation, while the energy of the teacher is focused more on teaching, listening, observing and creating formative assessments. "Whoever is doing most of the talking, is doing most of the learning."

The study guide for this book study course parallels the nine Chapters in the book, *Opening Minds*. Each page in the study guide references the Chapter in the book. Each pages includes "Key Ideas", "Before Reading" and "After Reading" and "Suggestions for Activities." As you read, the text, *Opening Minds* keep an annotated reading log of your own design. Take notes. Highlight. Interact with the text. Reflect. What's important and what's interesting, to YOU.

Choose or create activities to implement the language that changes lives in the classroom setting. (Please see Course Requirements.) If you are not in a classroom setting, find opportunities to implement the strategies in dialogue and interaction with others. In this way, you make the content of dynamic learning your own. Notice how simple the strategies are (even if the language is not yet your habit pattern) and notice what a difference in reaction it makes when you use words and phrases that focus on process and effort.

Synthesize your annotated reading log, and activity log in a short paper. Consider what worked; what needs improvement; how did students (or others) respond to the language of dynamic learning; what questions do you have; what problems did you encounter. Your experience is part of the research literature. Keep in mind the value of mistakes and errors a simply opportunities to learn and problem solve. Engage your peers in conversation and practice of dynamic learning. Use the idea of thinking together to come up with "fix it" strategies.

In the end, it is hoped you will continue to build your repertoire of dynamic learning strategies. Study the notes at the end of *Opening Minds* to appreciate the collaborative efforts that Johnston references to support the theory of dynamic learning. Check out

other sources such as Maria Nichols, *Comprehension through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop* (2006), *Talking About Text* (2008) and *Expanding Comprehension with Multigenre Text Sets* (2009) to gain a perspective on how to use the language of dynamic learning mindset in the reading workshop. Notice in your reading and active practice of using the principles of dynamic learning how the power of language impacts learning in a way that helps students to actively engage and take responsibility and ownership for the learning process.

Finally, write a final reflection paper focusing on what you learned as a result of close study of the text *Opening Minds* and the efficacy of dynamic learning strategies for creating a dialogic classroom where students are actively engaged in productive talk. Choose 2 statements from the six "research based" statements in Chapter 9 and reflect on how this book has opened your mind to their meaning and influenced the application of these teaching practices in your classroom, classroom learning culture, and school community. Prepare a plan for continued implementation of productive talk based on dynamic growth mindset. Evaluate the efficacy of developing social imagination, the foundation of conversation, democratic problem solving, collaboration, and the effects on academic progress.

Use the text, outside reading and writing activities to complete the course work.

A syllabus is available on www.collegecoursesonline.com

Course Requirements for Book Study

Use the study guide to direct your reading of *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives*. Complete the following course requirements for this book study course:

1**. Annotated Reading Log**: Keep an annotated reading log for the duration of this book study. As you read, note what's important, and what's interesting – to YOU. Summarize your annotated reading log in the synthesis paper. It is expected that you will invest a minimum of 10 hrs. in close study of *Opening Minds*, reading and writing.

2. **Application**: Demonstrate what you are learning in theory to classroom* practices. Each of the 9 chapters in *Opening Minds* deepens and intensifies the dynamic learning theory, offering you more than just language, but also systems and a philosophy of teaching that create a culture of social and emotional learning to foster engaged learning and productive talk. **Choose a minimum of 3 activities** from the suggestions in this study guide or create your own.** Record the activity and its outcome in an activity log. It is anticipated that you will spend 18 hrs. applying the principles of dynamic learning to the classroom* and evaluating the outcome.

*__Classroom:__ You may not be in the classroom while you are taking this book study course. The dynamic learning mindset may be practiced in any interaction even with yourself. Developing a dynamic learning mindset requires a certain shift of thinking for most of us, from fixed traits to a dynamic learning mindset. Choose activities that will help you be a teacher who uses the language of dynamic learning to actively engage students in productive talk. Record your process and findings in an activity log, summarized in the synthesis paper.

** If you are taking this course for 1.5 qtr. hrs. credit, please complete 4 activities.

A Sample of Activities from the Study Guide:

- Create a list of the words, phrases, and questions suggested in *Opening Minds* by Peter Johnston, Chapters 1-9. Use the language of dynamic learning in your classroom. Write the language of dynamic learning on your white board, sticky notes or create posters for the classroom. The more visible the language, the more it will remind you to practice and offer students language

that is productive and supportive of conversations with others. Focus on process and causal statements. Start small. Use the statements over a period of a week or until you find that you are using the dynamic language automatically. Repeat this process adding two or three phrases a week. Notice if you start creating your own process oriented / causal statements. Be sure to record your observations in your activity log, summarized in the synthesis paper.

- o What do you notice in your process of trying on new language patterns?
- o What do you notice about students' response to the dynamic learning strategies?
- o What do you notice about engaging students in productive conversations?

- Johnston includes transcripts in the text showing how the dynamic learning process engages student conversation. Notice that the role of the teacher is somewhat detached from the outcome of the discussion, but integral in valuing student contributions and guiding the conversation in productive ways. Review the scripts and examples in the text (Chap. 1-9) and make a list of teacher moves. What can you surmise are the intentions and guiding principles a teacher must believe to maintain a dynamic learning mindset and foster productive engagement? What do you notice about how teachers behave as illustrated in the text that helps them stay detached from the learning process of the student, and guide the conversation to deeper levels while also making formative assessments? Describe situations where you could you imitate these moves as you practice the language of dynamic learning.

- Trade terms of praise for feedback. This is an exercise that requires conscious thought and application. Catch yourself when you want to evaluate and use terms of judgment and replace praise with terms centered on student process and effort. Study the text for examples. Make a list of language that offers feedback instead of praise. Post it in the classroom. Use it and evaluate the process.

- Discuss the dynamic learning concept of "language can change lives" with a colleague. Pay attention to how this kind of process and causal language invites students in productive talk. Ask a colleague (teacher, administrator, paraprofessional, another adult) to observe (10 minutes +) your classroom specifically for evidence of the effects of how the language of dynamic learning engages students in productive talk. Ask for feedback.

- Johnston's work is a collaboration of thinking with teachers, research, and

research studies. Each chapter is replete with reference to studies and research to support the power of dynamic learning theory. Read the "Notes" for each chapter at the end of the book. Review the bibliography. Choose an article, or research study to further your understanding of dynamic learning, social imagination, praise versus feedback or any other topic you found interesting in your reading. Record your thinking in your activity log and include your views in your synthesis paper.

This is just a sample of activities. Others are listed at the end of each chapter in the study guide. You are also invited to submit activities of your own choosing. Please contact the instructor with your ideas.

3. **Synthesize Paper (3-4 pages):** Summarize the highlights of your annotated reading log, what struck you and what was interesting. Name the activities you chose, the outcome and your evaluation. What are the results of engaging students in productive talk? What did you see working well? What needs improvement? What questions do you have? What advice do you have to offer a colleague who wants to create dialogic classroom practice based on dynamic learning principles? The synthesis paper represents **90 % of your grade**

4. **Final Reflection Paper (2-3 pages)**: Peter Johnston asks readers to remember 6 statements about taking "researched-based" teaching seriously. **Choose 2 statements from the six provided in Chapter 9** and reflect on how this book has opened your mind to their meaning and influenced the application of these teaching practices in your classroom, classroom learning culture, and school community.

What is valuable to you about this book study and application process? What did you learn? How will you continue your practice? How could you share what you've learned with your colleagues? Focus on the effects and result of creating a dynamic learning environment that promote active student engagement and productive talk.

- How will you hold yourself accountable and what outcome do you anticipate?
- How can you enlist a colleague to help you with implementing a dynamic learning change?
- What indicators will you look for and listen for that will ensure you have made a positive change?

Identify 3 most important things you have learned as a result of this reading/learning experience. Elaborate in more detail on the 1 most important thing you have done and will continue to do to change the dynamic learning environment in your classroom to actively engage students in productive talk. **10% of your grade.**

A syllabus for this course is available on www.collegecoursesonline.com/

Chapter 1: Choosing Words, Choosing Worlds

Key Idea: How would a classroom that engages students with productive talk (dialogic classroom) look?

Before Reading

Peter Johnston jumps right into describing a classroom where productive talk is the standard classroom behavior. Notice how the classroom activity is centered on student conversations and the teacher's behavior supports student-learning processes. As you read this opening chapter, think about your classroom environment.

After Reading

What struck you in Chapter 1? What's important? What's interesting? Record your thinking in an annotated reading log, summarized in the synthesis paper.

What is your experience with dynamic learning classrooms like this? Are you a teacher like Pegeen Jensen? Do your students engage in conversation like Manny and Sergio? This book is about understanding the moves Pegeen makes as a teacher are couched in the dynamic learning mindset where the belief about learning is, " ability and intelligence grow with learning and depends on the situation… the more you learn, the better you get." (11) Pegeen is using the language of dynamic learning to establish an environment that nurtures productive talk. Though it looks as if Pegeen is a "natural," you too can learn this language. In fact start now and make a list of the words, phrases that Pegeen uses. As you read and study *Opening Minds*, collect the language of dynamic learning. As the subtitle suggests, "using language to change lives" is the purview of every teacher.

Suggested Activities for Chapter 1

- When has learning been exciting for you? Describe a time when you "loved to learn." Thinking over what you read in chapter 1 of *Opening Minds*. What are the similar characteristics of the time you "loved to learn" and what you read in Chapter 1?

Ex. Early in my career as a teacher, I had the opportunity to work with a social studies teacher who used the Hidla Taba inquiry model, a method of induction learning where the teacher's role was in leading discussions and asking questions, but encouraging students to share their ideas with their peers, justifying their opinions with evidence. Mr. L was a master at mediating, asking students to expand on their ideas, giving them ways to explore possibilities, giving time to clarify and justify. The 6th grade students would argue and defend their point of view. Everybody's input was acknowledged and what was originally the 'right" answer became more expansive and thoughtful as the discussions continued. The focus was on the ideas, and on process and strategy of thinking. And the learning in his classroom was energetic, alive. I loved being a part of the experience. It was electric. Students were engaged; all participated; and much learning was going on, in fact more than usual. I wanted to be a teacher like Mr. L.

- Create a list of the words, phrases, and questions suggested in *Opening Minds* by Peter Johnston, Chapters 1-9. Use the language of dynamic learning in your classroom. Write the language of dynamic learning on your white board, sticky notes or create posters for the classroom. The more visible the language of dynamic learning mindset, the more it will remind you to practice and offer students ways of having productive conversations with others. Focus on process and causal statements. Start small. Use the statements over a period of a week or until you find that you are using the dynamic language automatically. Repeat this process adding two or three phrases a week. Notice if you start creating your own process oriented / causal statements. Be sure to record your observations in your activity log, summarized in the synthesis paper.

    o What do you notice in your process of trying on new language patterns?
    o What do you notice about students' response to the dynamic learning strategies?
    o What do you notice about engaging students in productive conversations?

Chapter 2: Learning Worlds: People, Performing, and Learning

Key Idea: A comparison of the fixed performance mindset and the dynamic learning mindset. The beliefs we hold about learning can make all the difference in how students see themselves as learners**.** This is a pivotal chapter in this book.

Before Reading

Johnston outlines two theories of learning: "fixed-performance frame" and "dynamic-learning frame." He describes the characteristics and the consequences of each frame of thinking. Fixed performance is a mindset based on fixed traits or permanent abilities. Beliefs such as "I am bad at math," "I am smart," "I am dumb," "I'm a good reader" are typical of a fixed mindset.

A dynamic learning mindset is a belief system based on the idea that the more you learn the smarter you get. Learning is a process of thinking, effort and application. It is ok to make mistakes and learn from them. Learning can be hard, but hard can be fun and rewarding. Learning is not based on fixed traits but rather on effort, problem solving strategies and an internal faith in ones ability to learn. "I am learning math.", "I haven't figured this out yet, but I know I can."

The way we respond to student's thinking and process, the language we as teachers use in the classroom fosters either mindset.   Engaging students in active learning through productive talk benefits from using the language of the dynamic growth mindset.

After Reading

Reflect on your teaching /parenting/ growing up. Are you more familiar with a fixed trait or performance mindset or a dynamic learning mindset?

What was important in this chapter? What's interesting? Please record your reflections in your annotated reading log, summarized in the synthesis paper.

Ex. From my Annotated Reading Log: As I read this chapter, it is clear to me that I grew up in a fixed performance belief system. I judge myself by "fixed traits." I discover as I read and apply the ideas in Peter Johnston's book, *Opening Mind* that I can move from the habit of responding from a fixed performance belief system to a dynamic learning belief system just by changing the language I use. I notice that as I do, the changes are immediate. Relationships are more symmetrical; responsibility for learning is the student's; there is more conversation.

Suggested Activities for Chapter 2

- How would you describe your teaching style? Do you operate more from a fixed performance belief system or a dynamic learning belief system? Use Fig. 2.1 *Dynamic Learning Beliefs* and Fig. 2.2 *Consequences of Dynamic-Learning and Fixed-Performance Frames*, to identify where you are today.

- Johnston includes transcripts in the text showing how the dynamic learning process engages student conversation. Notice that the role of the teacher is somewhat detached from the outcome of the discussion, but integral in valuing student contributions and guiding the conversation in productive ways. Review the scripts and examples in the text (Chapters 1-9) and **make a list of teacher moves.** What can you surmise are the intentions and guiding principles a teacher must believe to maintain a dynamic learning mindset and foster productive engagement? What do you notice about how teachers behave as illustrated in the text that helps them stay detached from the learning process of the student, and guide the conversation to deeper levels while also making formative assessments? Describe situations where you could you imitate these moves as you practice the language of dynamic learning.

- Use the language of dynamic learning in your teaching practice. Record what you say and what effect it has on student behavior. Notice how the language you use changes the symmetry of the relationship and empowers students to take ownership for their learning, thinking and processing. Notice what happens to your teaching, your energy, and your involvement with students as you adopt a dynamic learning mindset. This is key to shifting the weight of learning from your back to the student, where it rightful belongs.

- Carol Dweck is an advocate of dynamic learning mindset and is one of the references in Peter Johnston's bibliography. Read more about her. Check out the web site and its tabs. Share your insights.
  http://mindsetonline.com/changeyourmindset/natureofchange/index.html

- Watch and listen to Carol Dweck on YouTube. Share your insights.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXrV0_3UjY

- Listen to Peter Johnston on *Opening Minds* on YouTube. Share your insights.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BQo6oPdtMY