Teach Up!:
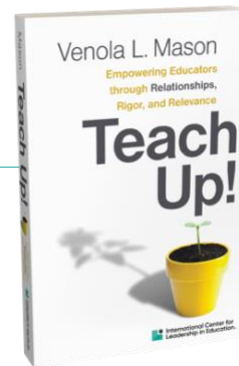*Empowering Educators through Relationships, Rigor, and Relevance*

TO START

Why a Study Group?

Research confirms that learning is a social activity. This is evident in our classrooms, where we hope to see high levels of student and teacher engagement, collective problem solving, and lively discussions. However, when it comes to our professional learning, we're often required to read and reflect on our own. This guide will help you facilitate engaging and meaningful conversations among colleagues. The hope is that it will raise important questions and reinforce your teaching practice by offering strategies for developing stronger relationships with your students, increasing rigor and relevance in your instruction, and creating a school-wide culture that embodies the *Teach Up!* mindset. Please keep in mind, it's important to create a safe environment where educators feel comfortable exchanging ideas, nurturing one another's growth, and inspiring introspection without fear of repercussion.

As you explore ways to help strengthen relationships, rigor, and relevance, the following are important elements to consider when organizing a study group:

Group Size. If your group includes the entire faculty, it may be useful to break into smaller groups on occasion to discuss particular topics. Certain types of analysis and reflective thinking are more successfully accomplished in pairs or groups of four. Be prepared to split the faculty into appropriate groups and keep track of start-and-stop times. If you're forming your own study group, consider inviting 8–12 people to participate. According to Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos, this is the ideal size for achieving high performance and engagement. Bezos refers to it as the "two pizza rule," as in you should be able to feed the entire group with two pizzas. These should be people who you respect and who challenge your thinking. They don't need to share all of the same opinions as you, but they should be open minded and able to have a thoughtful dialogue.

Invitations to Join. When inviting potential members to join the group, it's important to provide clear expectations for the types of conversations you'll have, the level of effort required, and the necessary disposition. Participants should have the desire to improve classroom outcomes and be willing to commit the time to make it happen. Ensure that your invitation includes group expectations, time frames, responsibilities, and proposed learning outcomes for the opportunity.

The Schedule. Time is a valuable resource for teachers. When planning your meetings, be explicit about the session times, locations, and the chapter(s) to be read. Unless the sessions will be run by a professional trainer or facilitator, consider identifying facilitators for each meeting to help split responsibility among the group. At the end of each meeting, be sure to offer a reminder about the next study session and required reading.

Norms and Expectations. This is especially important when discussing issues such as trauma and student behavior. The study group will function more seamlessly and feel more welcoming if you establish clear and explicit expectations at the start. Find ways to include everyone in the conversation and assure that their opinions are respected. Have a plan in place for redirecting the conversation if the group wanders off topic or needs to refocus. And, most importantly, establish an environment in which people feel psychologically safe to express their thoughts and feelings without worrying about criticism or censure.

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Study Questions. Study questions are provided for each chapter to help spark your discussion. Use these questions to open a line of inquiry or to encourage individual reflection. In addition, each chapter of the book, *Teach Up!*, includes "Key Takeaways." These summaries are intended to help readers incorporate and reference many of the ideas throughout the book and can be used as part of a study session or as a means of establishing a dialogue.

Shared Resources. Consider creating a shared folder or area for keeping the group's schedule, questions, answers, application tools, success stories, and resources. Having one location will help organize materials and strengthen the translation of content to classroom practice. Good places to keep shared resources include Google Drive, Google Classroom, One Drive, DropBox, and Box.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Book Summary and Guide Features

According to research, the single most important factor in determining how much a student will progress academically over the course of a year is his or her teacher. However, many well-intentioned teachers feel frustrated that they're not fully reaching their students. The key ingredient is their ability to create meaningful relationships that facilitate rigor and relevance in the classroom. *Teach Up!* offers guidance on how to create a successful culture for learning by building strong relationships with students. Additionally, it provides the strategies, techniques, and tools to help educators develop a more effective practice that engages students and invigorates the classroom. The book addresses:

- The importance of creating positive relationships with students and strategies for building these relationships in your classroom.

- The impact of trauma on students' behavior and academic performance, and how relationships can address these challenges.

- The ICLE Rigor/Relevance Framework and how to use it to plan and assess instruction.

- The effectiveness of "Quad D" learning and how to maximize rigor and relevance.

- Strategies for creating a school-wide culture that effectively leverages relationships, rigor, and relevance.

This study guide is a companion to *Teach Up!* This guide has been developed to support personal reflection and collaborative dialogue through suggested topics and questions. It includes "Learning Outcome(s)," "Study Questions," and "Action Steps" to help guide discussion and further individual exploration of each topic. It also includes a "Reflection Tool" for each chapter. This tool is intended to help readers organize thoughts and questions.

Teach Up!
Empowering Educators through Relationships, Rigor, and Relevance
https://leadered.com/publications/teachup/
Learning Companion Guide

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Introduction

Learning Outcome(s):

- Identify the power of positive teacher-student relationships and high academic expectations.

- Understand that building a great school culture or strong teacher-student relationships doesn't happen overnight.

Study Questions:

- Think back to when you were a K–12 student. Did you have a teacher who was passionate, engaging, and truly seemed to care about you? What did that teacher do to help support and challenge you? (p. 1)

- Now think about yourself as an educator. You probably hope to have a similar impact on your students: to design relevant and engaging instruction, to help students develop and flourish. What lessons can you apply from your own experiences with an exceptional teacher? (p. 1)

- Have you ever felt that, no matter how hard you work at designing lesson plans and grading assignments, you're not quite reaching your students? What causes this disconnect between intentions and outcomes? (p. 3)

- According to Wright and his colleagues, "the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher." What are some small successes and breakthroughs you'd like to aim for? (p. 5)

Action Steps:

- Establish group-based and individual goals for studying *Teach Up!*

- Review the upcoming reading assignment and next meeting time, date, and location.

Chapter 1: A Positive and Welcoming Culture for Learning

Learning Outcome(s):

- Identify the Relationships Framework and that these teacher-student connections are central to how and why we teach.

- Understand how to create a welcoming, student-centered, engaging learning space in your classroom.

- Establish effective relationship building strategies to get you started.

Study Questions:

- What are the connections between relationships, rigor, and relevance? And the links between emotional skills, interpersonal skills, and cognitive skills? How do these build on one another? (p. 10)

- Review the anecdote about David's experience on pp. 13–14. Why did David shut down? What could the teacher have done differently to create a learning environment that was positive, welcoming, and inclusive for David and the other students?

- What makes a space inviting? Do you employ any of the strategies mentioned in this chapter for creating a welcoming learning environment? Are there other practices you've tried and found successful? (p. 17)

- How does a student-centered classroom differ from that of a more traditional one? What are some small, inexpensive changes you can implement in your classroom to make it more student-centered? (p. 18)

- Getting to know your students allows you to better meet their individual needs. What techniques do you use to get acquainted with your students? How do you reach out to a student in need? Are there any methods mentioned in this chapter that you plan to use in your classroom? (p. 20)

Action Steps:

- Do an environmental walk through your school. What is displayed on the walls? What sounds do you hear in the hallways? Write down your observations about the culture and climate of the school. Create a plan for each member of your group to share their experience and what they learned (group text, email, etc.). (p. 13)

- Gather the answers to the prompt at the beginning and end of this chapter about "a current student who could benefit from a better or stronger relationship with you" (p. 7; pp. 20–21). Create a shared document to post your answers and compare responses.

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Chapter 1 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?

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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?

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During your meeting:

What are some important ideas that were brought up during your meeting?

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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
1._____
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?

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What are your next steps towards building stronger relationships?

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Additional notes:

Chapter 2: Relationships: Strategies for Creating Connection

Learning Outcome(s):

- Understand the three important indicators for building relationships: connection, compassion, and vulnerability.

- Implement relationship-building strategies that support connection, compassion, and vulnerability to create a learning environment in which all students can thrive.

Study Questions:

- Were you surprised to learn that discipline and classroom control are not about becoming stricter? What approaches are more effective, and why? (p. 23)

- Define connection, compassion, and vulnerability in the context of relationships. What do each of these look like in the classroom? (pp. 25–28)

- Why is vulnerability often seen as a negative state? What are the benefits of embracing vulnerability in the classroom? (p. 27)

- How often do you ask students about themselves and their lives? Do you also share personal information about yourself with them? How does this affect your relationships? (pp. 29–30)

- Do you tend to focus more on the positives about your students, or the negatives? If you gravitate toward the negatives, what are some ways you could begin to shift this practice? (p. 32)

Action Steps:

- Try incorporating one or two of the "Nine Relationship Strategies" in your classroom over the next week. (pp. 29–38). Discuss how your students responded at your next study group session.

- Review the Relationships Rubric (Appendix 2, pp. 121–127). How can you use this rubric to create a framework for planning and observing positive relationships in your classroom? What metrics will you use? Discuss your ideas at the next study group session.

Teach Up!
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Chapter 2 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?

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Additional notes:

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Chapter 3: PAUSE and REACT: A Tool for Supporting All Students

Learning Outcome(s):

- Identify the prevalence and effects of ACEs among students.

- Understand that helping a student who has experienced trauma or toxic stress is about forming strong, positive relationships.

- Implement the PAUSE & REACT tool when working with individual students.

Study Questions:

- What are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)? How do they affect a child's physical and mental health? What happens when more than one ACE is present? (pp. 41–43)

- Have you ever had a situation with an individual student or students when your usual relationship-building strategies did not work? Why do you think this happened? Were you able to try a different approach? (p. 44)

- The author presents the PAUSE and REACT tool as an approach to effectively support individual students. Which of these steps would you want to focus on? What support and resources would you need to do so? (pp. 46–47)

- Creating opportunities for students, rather than taking them away, is a more effective way to bring them into a positive relationship with learning and school. How do you create opportunities for your students to succeed? Do you offer opportunities both within the classroom and in the school community? (pp. 53–54)

Action Steps:

- Create a self-care plan. Include activities that bring you joy and help you manage stress. It can be simple things, like spending time with your family or friends, reading a book, or playing a sport. Commit to incorporating this self-care plan by an agreed upon date and share the results at an upcoming study group. (p. 56)

- Review the "Additional Strategies" provided at the end of this chapter: create calm, predictable transitions; praise publicly, criticize privately; adopt and adapt a mindfulness practice in your classroom; and take care of yourself (pp. 54–56). Try incorporating one of these strategies—in addition to self-care—in your classroom. Be ready to share your experience with your chosen strategy.

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Chapter 3 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?
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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?
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During your meeting:

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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?
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What are your next steps towards building stronger relationships?
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Additional notes:

Chapter 4: The Four Quadrants of Learning

Learning Outcome(s):

- Define rigor and relevance in student instructional tasks.

- Analyze the Rigor/Relevance Framework including the Knowledge Taxonomy, the Application Model, and the Four Learning Quadrants.

Study Questions:

- The author uses the example of vocabulary words to distinguish different levels of the Knowledge Taxonomy: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating. Choose one or two of your own learning and assessment methods and scaffold it according to these levels. How often are you engaging students at higher levels? (pp. 59–61)

- Describe Quadrants A, B, C, and D in the Rigor/Relevance Framework. What types of learning fall under each quadrant? (pp. 62–64)

- Why do we need more rigorous and relevant instruction? How can we use resources like the Rigor/Relevance Framework to help prepare our students for future jobs and the future world? (pp. 66–67)

- It is up to the teacher to define the appropriate levels of rigor and relevance in instruction. With that mindset, how can the Rigor/Relevance Framework be used as a guide to teach standards? How can you lead students to different types of learning experiences? (pp. 69–70)

Action Steps:

- Try sharing the Rigor/Relevance Framework with your students. Ask them to reflect on learning experiences that fit within the various quadrants. How might you incorporate their responses into your lessons? (p. 68)

- Choose one of the "Strategies to Increase Rigor and Relevance" to implement in your classroom in the next week. (pp. 70–71) Discuss how your students respond at your next study group session.

Chapter 4 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?
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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?
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During your meeting:

What are some important ideas that were brought up during your meeting?
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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?
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What are your next steps towards increasing rigor and relevance in instruction?
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Additional notes:

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Chapter 5: Instruction for Today's Classrooms

Learning Outcome(s):

- Define curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

- Identify the role of technology in the Rigor/Relevance Framework.

- Understand how to create interdisciplinary learning.

- Apply the Rigor/Relevance framework to your teaching to better integrate instructional tasks from each of the four quadrants.

Study Questions:

- What distinguishes curriculum, instruction, and assessment? When planning a lesson, do you treat these three components as separate steps, or are they more interrelated? Have you tried using a "backward design" approach? (pp. 74–75)

- Instruction is much more beneficial if it ends with students demonstrating their knowledge and using their skills. How do you ensure that your activities aren't just seen as busy work? What kinds of products and performances do you incorporate? (p. 76)

- This chapter argues that our fragmented approach to teach different subjects does not effectively prepare students for life beyond school. What suggestions does the author offer for creating curriculum that incorporates standards from multiple disciplines? How do you develop activities that cross the boundaries of disciplines in a purposeful way? (pp. 78–79)

- How does blended learning differ from a technology rich classroom? What benefits does blended learning offer to students? (pp. 81–82)

Action Steps:

- Refer to Figure 5.1, Technology Applications for Rigorous and Relevant Learning. (p. 83) Which of these applications do you currently use in your classroom? Try implementing a new application in the next week.

- Try using the Instructional Planning Guide template to design an instructional task. (pp. 84–86)
  Share your results at an upcoming study group.

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Chapter 5 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?

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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?

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During your meeting:

What are some important ideas that were brought up during your meeting?

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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?

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What are your next steps towards increasing rigor and relevance in instruction?

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Additional notes:

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Chapter 6: The Quad D Classroom Experience

Learning Outcome(s):

- Identify techniques for increasing student engagement.

- Understand how to implement and assess Quad D tasks and learning experiences.

- Establish strategies for creating Quad D moments in your classroom.

Study Questions:

- It's not always easy to increase student engagement. What does engaged Quad D learning look like? How do the Quad D Idea Lab experiences of "MonuMaker" and "Classroom Re:Design" engage their participants? (pp. 91–93)

- How can creating Quad D tasks make your planning and classroom time more efficient? (pp. 93–94)

- What are the two learning pathways of Quad D instruction and how do they differ from one another? How do they provide for student choice? (pp. 94–95)

- Refer to the list of eight quiet Quad D moments. (pp.101–102) Are there any tasks that you can drop into your day, or use to open a lesson? How might you adapt these to fit the subject and grade level you teach?

Action Steps:

- When implementing Quad D learning tasks, it's important to look for ways to connect them to real-world experiences. How can your students engage with the surrounding community and organizations? Can you arrange for your students to connect with a businessperson, a politician, or a community advocate? Can you incorporate real-world tools and materials? Work with your group to create a Quad D learning task with real-world connections. (p. 90)

- Pick one of the Quad D Learning Experiences (pp. 97–99) to try in your classroom. Share how it went at an upcoming study group session.

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Chapter 6 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?

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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?

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During your meeting:

What are some important ideas that were brought up during your meeting?

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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?

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What are your next steps towards increasing rigor and relevance in instruction?

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Additional notes:

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Chapter 7: A Teach Up! Culture and Community

Learning Outcome(s):

- Identify that collaboration and communication is key to establishing school-wide rigor and relevance.

- Understand the importance of creating a school culture that values positive relationships.

- Establish the importance of community and how to help create or maintain it in your school.

Study Questions:

- Describe your school culture. What do you celebrate? What are your values? What changes would you like to see? (pp. 105)

- Anthropologist Margaret Mead encourages us to "Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has." Discuss how you can affect change beyond the walls of your classroom. Who can you reach out to for help? Who will be part of your support system? (pp. 108)

- Studies have shown that schools are more effective when teachers have opportunities to observe and help one another. How often do you participate in peer observation? How often do you meet with other teachers to collaborate? What steps can you take to make your school environment more collaborative? (pp. 109–112)

- Creating a welcoming school community also means building strong relationships with parents. How do you connect with parents throughout the year? How do you establish trust so you can manage any difficult conversations that may arise? (pp. 112–113)

Action Steps:

- Refer to the "Ideas for Strong Teacher Collaboration" box (p. 109). Choose one of these tips to implement in your classroom and one for your group to advocate for at the school level.

- Determine at least three other educators who you would recommend read *Teach Up!* Share a copy of the book, as well as your own experiences, with them. Be supportive in their journeys as they reimagine an education system that supports strong relationships as well as rigorous and relevant instruction.

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Chapter 7 Reflection Tool

Date: _____

Before you meet:

What ideas resonated with you from the chapter? Do you have any questions?

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Review the "Key Takeaways" section of the chapter. What additional topics do you wish the author had covered?

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During your meeting:

What are some important ideas that were brought up during your meeting?

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What three key points did you take away from the discussion?
1._____
2._____
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After your meeting:

Reflect on your discussion. Did it alter your perspective? If so, how?

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What are your next steps towards building a schoolwide community that embraces relationships, rigor, and relevance?

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Additional notes: