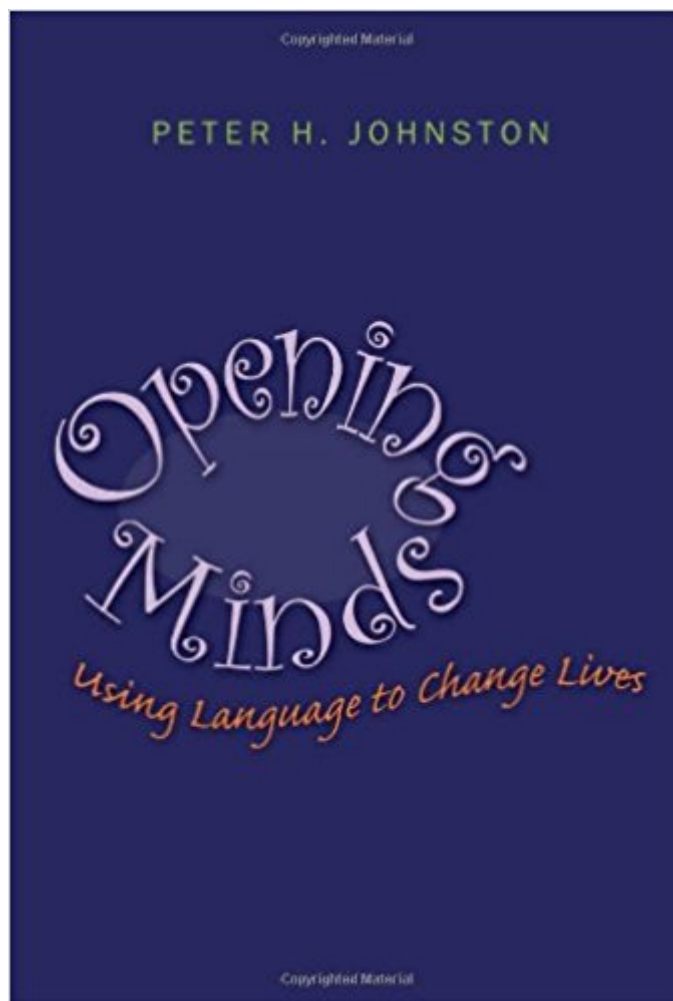


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# Opening Minds: Using Language To Change Lives



## Synopsis

Introducing a spelling test to a student by saying, 'Let's see how many words you know,' is different from saying, 'Let's see how many words you know already.' It is only one word, but the already suggests that any words the child knows are ahead of expectation and, most important, that there is nothing permanent about what is known and not known. Peter Johnston

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

By combining rich descriptions of classroom interactions with research to back up his claims, Johnston writes convincingly and paints lasting images of effective ways to engender agency (the will to act), positive self-theories, and constructive perspectives to change lives within our classrooms. --Language Arts  
Johnston's thinking is transformative. He has created a layered effect of ideas and theories that form a solid path to becoming a master in the apprenticeship of children into humanity. --MiddleWeb  
It is brilliant. Just as in *Choice Words*, Johnston packs a ton into a small book. --A Year of Reading blog

Peter Johnston has made a career researching and articulately presenting insights into how to help children grow as readers and develop intellectual curiosity. In *Opening Minds* he focuses on how the words and state of mind we inhabit can make a real difference in the classroom. For instance, when introducing a spelling test, he asks that we observe the difference between saying, "Let's see how many words you know" and "Let's see how many words you already know." The sentences are

only different by one word, "but the "already" suggest that any words the child knows are ahead of expectation and, most important, that there is nothing permanent about what is known and not known." In *Opening Minds*, Johnston covers a wide range of issues, from more skillful ways to work with motivating students to ways of developing social intelligence (or, as he calls it, social imagination). Johnston does this in ways that hint at how he hopes others will teach. That is, he never hits us over the head with "shoulds" and "must-dos", but gives examples that help lead us to developing more thoughtful approaches. I especially liked his chapter on praise. In it he points out how relying heavily on praise (which is a popular approach in this era of self-esteem boosting) has some downsides, such as creating an arms race around what is real praise and what is faint praise -- and ultimately keeps us in an externally-motivated rewards and punishment system. Instead, he gently leads us to see the greater value of taking a real interest in your students work. By asking questions that bring out greater depth, the student learns depth and intellectual probing is most important, and that you genuinely care; all this, without setting up a dynamic that leads the student to look for praise. The work itself becomes the reward. In retrospect this makes obvious sense: in a way, praise can be an easy short cut, while really paying attention and putting yourself in the student's frame of mind takes more work and effort. What I especially liked about this chapter is Johnston got us there in such a gentle way, that I wasn't left with the feeling of "what a dope I'd been in the past." This approach leads by example. It's hard to imagine a teacher not benefitting from this book, and non-teachers too for that matter. Since we're all kids underneath our adult facade and protective layers, we can communicate more clearly with his gentle but thoughtful approaches.

No matter what subject you teach or grade you teach, you must have this short little book. I read it in one afternoon--short, but jam-packed with great stuff. It's basically qualitative research told in narrative form. It compares and contrasts teaching styles and what is more effective for students to excel. It really questions our government's current obsession for testing which loses the whole love of learning for the sake of learning! The teachers described here have classrooms based on respect and high expectations and they get results, man. A major portion is devoted to developing a student's sense of self-efficacy. It replaces destructive thought patterns like, "I'm stupid at math" and "I'm no good at spelling" and "It's the teacher's fault for making me get an F on the test" with positive, realistic, can-do thoughts--but realistic, honest thoughts, not ooey-goey feel groovy crap. I highly recommend this book and the companion book "*Choice Words*." Both books recognize the great power that teachers have over the thought lives and academic lives of their students. We

teachers must use that power in constructive ways. WOW!!

In this relatively slim volume, Johnston includes a wealth of ideas and techniques for teaching literacy and language skills in a more just, compassionate and socially responsible manner. He focuses on dialogic instruction—specifically on the language we use when we speak to and with students—and the value of using a dynamic learning frame that emphasizes every student's ability to learn, grow, and develop not only cognitively and intellectually but also emotionally and socially. Johnston is interested in far more than “just teaching.” He believes that teachers have a responsibility for helping their students mature into responsible and concerned citizens who are equipped with the academic, social, and emotional skills to effect real change in the world. This book will benefit anyone interested in social justice education—that is to say, anyone who is interested in meaningful education.

I used the ideas in just the first four chapters of this book with my many students during the last month of school, and couldn't believe the difference it made! Everyone who works with PEOPLE should read this book. It's the real way we should be teaching and dealing with children if we REALLY want to be a country that can compete in the world. I wish all those working in education and those making laws about education would be required to read this book!

I loved this book, very mind-opening. I feel like I should have read *Choice Words* first. The end of the book became a little redundant which made me wonder how different this book is from his first. However, I do not regret having this insight personally (how I view and treat myself and those around me), as an educator and as a parent.

Helpful for use in my classroom.

This is well written. I simply don't agree with some of Johnston's philosophies. I do agree however with his understanding of the important impact that language usage has on children. I do like the whole way this book takes things apart. Yeah, I do like that :+)

This book should be required reading for all teachers. The power of language is phenomenal, and teachers are in a unique place to hurt or help students with their words. Often we don't realize how

powerful our words are, and how carefully we need to choose them. Like body language, words have a language that is between the lines.

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