

Harness the Collaborative Power of Lesson Study

Jacqueline Hurley

Teachers have issues: student engagement and motivation, best teaching practices, standards and benchmarks, high-stakes testing, graduation rates, school grades, and more. With all the issues surrounding teaching these days, how can teachers feel confident they are creating, planning, and delivering lessons that effectively cover it all? One collaborative structure teachers can use is lesson study.

How Lesson Study Works

First, 4 to 10 teachers, coaches, and administrators team up and plan a lesson to deliver in approximately 6 to 8 weeks. Next, the lesson study team members agree on a weekly planning time. During the first planning session, team members look at student data and identify a research theme. Over the next several weeks, the team collaboratively plans a benchmark-based lesson to address student need.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel during a lesson study. Using previously created lessons is encouraged, with a goal of making thoughtful changes in the teaching approach, thus promoting student success. During the planning sessions, it is important for the lesson study team to predict student questions and responses ("If x happens, then I will ..."). Once the team plans the lesson, a group member is randomly chosen to deliver the lesson in class while the other members observe (substitute teachers will be needed to cover classes during the demonstrating lesson and the debriefing session to follow).

This process is wonderful because the observing members will not judge or mentally alter the lesson during its delivery because the demonstrating teacher must follow the lesson planned and agreed on by the team. Furthermore, the observing teachers all have specific duties during the lesson delivery. Armed with clipboards and premade observation sheets, each observer pays full attention to one aspect of the lesson (e.g., student accountable talk; student time on task; student comprehension; student-created, higher-order questions; student responses to teacher questions). Immediately following the lesson, the team meets for a debriefing session. Here they discuss, reflect on, and analyze their observations. Based on the debriefing session, the team can discuss the next steps for the students in that class and revise the lesson for future use.

The Benefits of Lesson Study

All too often, teachers come to school in the morning, head straight to their classrooms, and don't emerge until it's time to go home. Participating in lesson studies provides teachers an outlet for their frustrations, a sounding board for their ideas, and a place to learn new teaching practices, all while fostering a sense of camaraderie with their coworkers. However, it is not only the teachers who benefit from lesson studies. We are here for the students, right? Through lesson studies, students are exposed to rigorous, benchmark-based, and carefully crafted lesson plans. Students' individual needs are identified and scrutinized during the planning stages of the lesson study and reassessed during the debriefing session. Next steps are based on what will be most beneficial for student success. For those teachers who are stuck in the mind-set of "There isn't enough time," or "My way of teaching is just fine," I urge them to give lesson study a try. Lesson study creates a professional learning community that focuses your time. It is a research-based practice that promotes opportunities for high-quality teaching and learning. With Common Core State Standards and their assessments just around the corner, lesson study provides a way to stay ahead of the curve.

Jacqueline Hurley is the literacy coach at Pinellas Park High School in Largo, Fla., and a doctoral candidate in the field of K-12 instructional leadership and curriculum.

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