

Engaging Middle Level Teachers in Literacy through Lesson Study

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May 5, 2008

Lesson Study is a “comprehensive and well-articulated process for examining practice” (Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003, p. 171). The Lesson Study approach is a method of professional development that has teachers collaboratively plan a lesson and research the results of that lesson. The Lesson Study approach is the way Japanese teachers have studied their practice for decades, and was recently introduced in the United States as a new way to think about professional development. A group of educators who were trying to understand why Japan’s students scored so much higher than students in the United States in mathematics suggested that one of the reasons for Japan’s successful schools could be their method of professional development. These educators discovered that Japanese teachers had developed a way to plan instructional lessons and examine student achievement in a method that was translated by Makoto Yoshida as Lesson Study (1999). Stigler and Hierbert (1999) popularized Lesson Study in their book about international methods of instruction. Lesson Study is now one of the fastest-growing approaches to teacher research and professional development (Lewis, Perry, Hurd, & O-Connell, 2006).

Lesson Study has a number of features in common with the teacher research that is popular in the United States, but there are also distinct differences. In the Lesson Study approach, a community of teachers collaborates on a single research lesson. After considering how the lesson fits with the school’s overall goals, detailing possible teacher comments, and predicting how students will respond, one of the teachers implements the research lesson. The other teachers in the group observe the lesson and collect data on student responses. After the lesson, the group meets to discuss the lesson and to decide the extent to which the instructional goals were met. Then the teachers revise the lesson, and they may reteach it using the revised form (Stepanek, Appel, Leong, Mangan, & Mitchell, 2007).

This microscopic approach to teaching produces exemplar lessons that are often published as models of instruction. The benefit of Lesson Study, however, is not merely the production of outstanding lesson. Teachers who participate in developing the research lessons learn from each other how to develop powerful lessons and they work together to make a positive effect on students outcomes.

The research base on Lesson Study outside of Japan is growing and the initial studies in science and math are encouraging (Lewis, Perry, Matuata, 2006; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998; Linn, Lewis, Tsuchida, & Songer, 2000). Experts on Lesson Study recognize that North American teachers have different cultural obstacles to collaboration than do Japanese teachers; however, they believe that Lesson Study has great potential for professional development in countries outside of Japan (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004; Wiburg & Brown, 2007).

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This publication was made possible in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the U.S. Department of Education, Title IIA, University/School Partnership (USP) Program. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.