

Guide to Lesson Study*

1) Purpose and Goals

Improving something as complex and culturally embedded as teaching requires the efforts of all the players, including students, parents, and politicians. But teachers must be the primary driving force behind change. They are best positioned to understand the problems that students face and to generate possible solutions.

-James Steigler and James Herbert, *The Teaching Gap*.

Lesson study provides an ongoing method to examine, refine, and improve instruction. To plan research lessons, teachers draw on expertise from within and outside the classroom and school; they gather the best lessons and instructional techniques and improve these *through careful observation of their own students*. Lesson study builds collaboration as teachers progressively improve lessons that are “our” lesson, not “my” lessons. In the lesson study cycle teachers work together to

1. Formulate goals for student learning and long-term development.
2. Collaboratively plan a “research lesson” designed to bring life to these goals.
3. Conduct the lesson, with one team member teaching and others gathering evidence on student learning and development.
4. Discuss the evidence gathered during the lesson, using it to improve the lesson, the unit, and instruction more generally.

If desired, the research lesson may be taught by another team member in another classroom, and discussed and revised again.

During the lesson study cycle teachers should have the opportunity to

1. Think carefully about the goals of a particular lesson, unit, and subject area.
2. Study and improve the best available lessons.
3. Deepen subject-matter knowledge. What knowledge is important? What are the gaps in our understandings? How do I get the needed information?
4. Think deeply about long-term goals for students. What is the gap between where the students are and what we hope they will become?
5. Collaboratively plan lessons.
6. Carefully study student learning and behavior.
7. Develop instructional knowledge. e.g., the kinds of questions and activities that stimulate student interest and learning.

* Adapted from Catherine Lewis, “Lesson Study: A Handbook for Teacher-Led Improvement of Instruction,” 2002. Copyright Catherine C. Lewis and the handbook publisher: Philadelphia, Research for Better Schools, 2002 (www.rbs.org). Do not reproduce without written permission.

2) Lesson Study Steps

A. Choosing a theme and topic for lesson

Questions to consider

- a) **What academic skills, thinking skills and understandings are essential to the study of history? What skills and understandings are essential to this lesson?**
- b) **What do you want students to know and understand about the selected topic and the history of democracy in America?**

B. Writing, finding, or refining a lesson – Developing an instructional plan

Questions to consider

- a) What are the short and long-term goals?
- b) What does it mean to say a student understands a particular historical, event, individual, or concept?
- c) **What is the plan? - Activities, questions, problems posed by teacher and anticipated student responses to both the topic and materials. How does the lesson plan build upon those responses?**
- d) What historical thinking skills are necessary for success on this lesson?

3) Gathering data – What to look for?

Members of the lesson study group decide on specific data to be collected and may design forms to aid in data collection, such as

- A. Seating charts to record how many students participate or how student thinking changed.
- B. List of members of student groups to aid observation of a group's discussion.
- C. A version of the lesson with space to record the lesson timing and "points to notice" in the lesson, such as student
 - a) academic learning and skills.
 - b) motivation and engagement.
 - c) social behavior.
 - d) attitudes toward learning.
 - e) previous knowledge.

4) Discussing and Analyzing the Lesson

- The teacher who taught the lesson speaks first and has the chance to point out any difficulties in the lesson before they can be pointed out by others. (Teachers need not criticize something that's already been pointed out as an issue)
- The lesson belongs to the whole study group.
- Discussion focuses on the data that were collected by the observers; observers talk specifically about the student work and conversations they recorded.

5) Supports for Lesson Study

1. Select a small portion of the curriculum.
 - Lesson study focuses on how to teach, not what to teach.
2. Remain self-critical
 - Teachers believe that lessons can always be improved and that open, honest, self-critical reflection is the way to do it.
3. Openness to outsiders.
 - Keep the group open to new members.
4. Embrace mistakes.
 - Not a quick fix, but a slow, steady means for teachers to improve instruction
 - The yardstick for measuring worth is how much is learned.
 - Much can be learned from imperfect lessons
5. Don't worship originality
 - What's important is whether the plan promotes student learning, not if it is original.
6. Develop group norms.
 - Think about what will make your group productive and supportive.
 - Formulate and revisit your ground rules.