



Beyond “Groundhog Day”: Lesson Study in the History-Social Studies Classroom

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Some Context to the Work

“What would you do if you were stuck in the same place and every day was exactly the same and nothing you did mattered?”

- Weatherman Phil Connors (Bill Murray)
in “Ground Hog Day”

[Groundhog Day trailer](#)

Instructional Change?

I believe a number of the teachers I worked with would also say that their practice has changed, progressed, over the years.

A question about these changes is, of course, on what basis were they made? What were the goals, beliefs, understandings, and experiences that fueled this work? Did our understanding and definition of what it meant to "get it right," fundamentally change as we gained classroom experience?

If the answer to this question is yes, which I believe it is, then a subsequent question becomes how did that change occur and why were we willing to make those changes? These are intriguing questions in light of the widely held belief that teachers have been reluctant, in response to many different reform efforts, to change their practice and adopt different modes of instruction in response to changing student populations and changing times.

Some Possible Answers

- Work with colleagues
- “Seeing” other classrooms – a focus on student work
- A “formative” perspective on instruction – a sense of the big picture
- Large goals and “small” victories
- An inquiry stance towards practice – “teacher research” / “action research”

Lesson Study: The Big Picture

Lesson Study:

- Focuses on steady, long term, instructional improvement
- Maintains a constant focus on student learning
- Focuses on the improvement of teaching in context
- Is collaborative

Professional Development

TRADITIONAL

- Begins with answer
- Driven by expert
- Communication
trainer -> teachers
- Relationships hierarchical
- Research informs practice

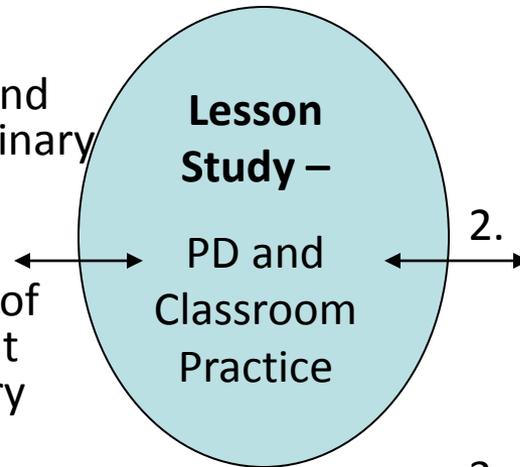
RESEARCH LESSONS

- Begins with question
- Driven by participants
- Communication among
teachers
- Relationship reciprocal
- Practice is research

Lesson Study in the History/Social Studies Classroom

Teacher Learning

1. Content – Increased and refined understanding course content
2. Historical thinking – Increased and refined understanding of disciplinary thinking and approaches
3. Increased and refine repertoire of effective teaching strategies that combine content and disciplinary thinking.
4. Increased knowledge of strategies to help students develop the reading and writing skills necessary to construct a thoughtful and coherent historical account and argument.



Student Learning

1. Increased engagement and achievement in the study of history/social studies
2. Increased and deepened knowledge of history/social studies.
3. Increased ability to read and write in history/social studies.

Lesson Study – the Steps

(see Lesson Study Planning Guide and Protocol)

1. Form groups and plan the research lesson – **identify topic and question for students and question for teachers**
2. Develop the lesson
3. Teach and observe the lesson
4. Discuss and analyze the research lesson – a two step process
 - a) Use time immediately after observation to analyze observation notes, pieces of student work, and student words
 - b) Reconvene at some point in the future to analyze larger piece of student writing that lesson study was to support and inform.
5. Refine and revise the lesson

What Makes a Good Teacher Question?

What Questions are Worth Investigating?

The Big Picture: Is there a gap between where students are – in terms of historical knowledge, academic skills, and personal qualities - and where you want them to be when they leave your class?

- "How do you move students from where they are to a new place?"
- "How can this lesson help accomplish that goal?"

Some criteria for a good teacher question include:

- 1) It leads to an investigation of an instructional issue you don't know the answer to
- 2) It leads to an examination of whether some instructional assumptions and practices are effective, or how they might be made more effective.
- 3) It has both theoretical and practical implications.
- 4) It leads to an investigation of an instructional issue, idea, or strategy you've struggled with. Its answer is important to you and your students.
- 5) It has the potential to generate enough evidence to develop an answer.

Choosing a Lesson Study Theme – Thinking about the Students You Teach

Your Ideals:

What academic and personal qualities would you like your students to have when they leave your class for the next grade?

The Actual:

In the context of the academic and personal qualities you mentioned above – Where are your students now?

The Gap:

Compare the ideal and the actual. What are the gaps that you would most like to work on?

The Research Question:

How can the curriculum you teach help bridge the gap?
Develop a question that might frame your investigation into instruction focused on the skill or quality you choose to work on.

A Few Examples

- Does dramatic historical role-play spark higher quality and quantity of historical writing? (a focus on engagement and generating fluency)
- What kinds of textbook(s) reading and writing assignments might promote students' ability to understand and assess historical significance? (a focus on strategies for using instructional resources)
- How can an instructional focus on the idea of freedom help students understand the experience of freedmen and freedwoman after the Civil War, and understand how the idea of freedom has been conceptualized and reconceptualized at different points in American history? (a focus on historical thinking – empathy and interpretation)

Planning the Research Lesson

Where do the Lesson Study topics and the student questions come from?
What topics are worth teaching for Lesson Study?

- The pacing guides - Where will you be in the curriculum when the lesson is taught?
- Standards and testing – What content and topics are emphasized and tested?
- Suggestions from historians - What are some of the significant historical topics and ideas in your curriculum?
- Student surveys - What issues, understandings, and misunderstandings might be explored?
- Student Interest – What topics and activities have the potential to engage and interest teachers?
- Topics you want to teach but haven't yet taught and want to learn more about.

Answering the Teacher Question

What data will be gathered?

How are the teacher question and lesson design connected?

Teacher Question:

1) What kinds of textbook reading and writing assignments might promote historical thinking?

Sub questions:

2) How can I assess what students were learning, through these assignments, about the study of history and thinking historically?

3) To what degree were my goals accomplished?

4) Implications for other teachers and classrooms?

Potential Data Sources	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
student interviews - individual or small group	X		X	
Observer field notes	X		X	
Student surveys	X		X	X
assessments (quizzes, exams, projects, history portfolio)	X	X	X	
student written work	X	X	X	X
audio or video tapes	X			X
Lesson Study group post lesson discussion notes	X	X	X	X

Three Groups Analyze a Lesson

Group 1

- A focus on Chinese immigration and 5th grade students ability to develop broad historical understandings from the experiences of individuals in a particular time and place.

Group 2

- A focus on slavery and 5th graded students ability to develop a nuanced understanding of freedom.

Group 3

- A focus on the Mexican-American War and 11th grade students ability to use primary source documents to develop and debate an historical argument.

Video – Two 5th Grade Groups

Questions to consider

- What about this activity seems useful? What are teachers learning?
- What about this professional development activity seems challenging?
- What questions are raised?

Challenges During the Observation and Debriefing Portion

- The need to focus on what students are learning, not on evaluating the teacher.

“Developing the eyes to see students.”

- Finding a balance between being too critical and not critical enough.

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Deepening the Analysis – Teacher Commentary on the Lesson

The lesson being observed sits as part of a larger series of lessons designed to develop student understanding about a particular historical question. Therefore the debrief has two parts.

- 1) Immediately after the teaching of the lesson and,
- 2) at a later time after final pieces of student writing have been collected.

Deepening the Analysis – Teacher Commentary on the Lesson

After the two debriefings teachers write commentaries on what they learned. The slides that follow include the student and teacher questions, and excerpts from the teacher analysis.

Questions raised by the commentaries

- 1) What do the commentaries tell us about teacher learning and the stance they have taken towards their practice?
- 2) What role might the Lesson Study process have played in this stance?

Student Question: Was the WPA successful?

Teacher Question: Does using a local lens help students better understand a national issue (i.e. the government role in the economy)?

From the analysis:

We hypothesized that students' engagement would increase if they examined primary sources from their local community. What we discovered was that many of our students' ideas of local were geographically limited to their immediate neighborhood rather than the city of Oakland and the Bay Area as we had anticipated. When observing the groups there was little discussion about the local evidence of the WPA contained in the sources, although one group was surprised to find out that Roosevelt Middle School was a WPA project. Another group was unaware of the location of Mills College where the WPA planted trees, which is only two miles away from their school.

In terms of the student writing responses, some students gave their own definition of economic success. For example, Student A wrote "In the Great Depression, success means more people hired for jobs and less unemployment." However the majority of students defined success in general rather than in economic terms. For example Student B wrote "The definition of success is to accomplish goals."

Although the students identified counterarguments on the note-taking sheet questions, few of them successfully incorporated these counterarguments in their writing responses. Some students made an attempt, but not in an in depth way. For example, Student A wrote "On the other hand, people are saying the WPA was a waste of money...It was not a waste of money because they helped out a lot of people by giving them jobs. It helped them learn something new..."

Student Question: How is transportation important to the economy?

Teacher Question: How can we design lessons that provide students the opportunity to improve and revise their thinking?

From the analysis:

The teacher question was about how to structure a lesson, any lesson, to give students the chance to reflect on their learning process, rather than on any specific content. By thus focusing on the form of the lesson instead of solely on the content, the teacher question helped us pay attention to the general structure of the lesson, so that we did not get permanently bogged down in the details of the particular information we hoped to convey. One of the great consequences of having such a teacher question, we realized, is that it made the entire lesson planning process more transferable to future lessons.

One More Example – A Lesson Overview

Using the biography of Dorothea Dix is a great way to challenge students to decide what characteristics a person must have to be considered a hero. Dix is mainly known and praised for her accomplishments in improving the conditions of prisons and the mentally ill. However, her actions and views on important issues such as race and religion challenge students to see her as a complex historical figure.

This lesson asks students to first look at Dix's work around the mentally ill and then to examine her beliefs and actions around other mid-nineteenth century issues. This comparison provides a rich discussion on what qualities heroes should have and whether any flaws are tolerated in heroic figures. Although Dix focused her efforts solely on the sick and mentally ill, studying Dix also allows provides a window for examining additional mid-nineteenth issues in American history - such as immigration, slavery, and abolitionism.

from the Lesson Analysis

Although many [students] had strong feelings toward her views on race and gender, they still were able to acknowledge her contributions to mental health reform.

Understanding why some students were better able to reach this mental compromise while others could not is something we are intrigued by. While many students were able to summarize and describe what Dix did, they were unable to critically think through these facts and develop opinions on the historical significance of the information learned. Something we would like to investigate in the future is implementing extra steps to help students scaffold their thinking. This also would facilitate in the writing process. For instance, the use of sentence prompts would help guide students in their writing and learning. An overarching question we would use to organize their thinking is: *How exceptional or ordinary (typical) was Dix for her time?*

Excerpts of Findings from the OUSD History Grant Evaluation

- 71% of participating teachers said they discussed teaching history with other teachers, only 24% said they met on an on-going basis throughout the school year
- Of the 71% teachers who said they discussed history with colleagues prior to participating in the grant, *all* described these conversations as less structured than lesson study.
- Over 75% of the teachers who participated in the grant expressed an interest in finding ways to collaborate with other teachers to learn more about their teaching.

Excerpts of Findings from the OUSD History Grant Evaluation – sample teacher comments

- “I very much enjoyed the ‘lesson study’ process as it structured time to evaluate lessons, something that seems to get lost in the daily process of trying to get through the curriculum.” - 11th grade teacher
- “I am interested in cultivating a “lesson study’ culture at my school site because it is a valuable method of staff development.” – 5th grade teacher
- “Working with my lesson study colleagues has been an enriching experience for me because it has helped me think more about how I teach and how I can do this craft more powerfully.” – 8th grade teacher

Lesson Study – Implementation Challenges

- Emphasis on test scores and immediate results
- Getting teachers and schools and involved while avoiding mandates
- Focus on proscribed curricula
- Would require a reallocation of some monetary and time resources
- Pacing may need to be more flexible
- Acceptance of inquiry stance toward practice – especially from administrators

Lesson Study Provides Opportunities to

1. Think Deeply About Long-term Goals for Students
2. Carefully Consider the Goals of a Particular Content Area, Unit, and Lesson
3. Study the Best Available Lessons
4. Plan Lessons that Bring to Life both Short-term and Long-term goals
5. Deepen Subject Matter Knowledge
6. Expand Instructional Knowledge
7. Build Capacity for Collegial Learning
8. Develop the “Eyes to See Students”

Lesson Study: The Big Picture

1. Expect continual and gradual instructional improvement
2. Maintain a constant focus on student learning
3. Focus on teaching, not teachers
4. Makes improvements in context
5. Make instructional improvement the work of teachers

Some Lesson Study Do's and Don'ts – from OUSD Teachers

DO'S

- Allow enough time to teach lesson.
- Assume best intent.
- Map out year with Lesson Study colleagues so teaching at the same time.
- Complete analysis of lesson on the day of Lesson Study observation.
- Ensure that the student question is observable.
- Look at how groups are formed.
- Answer this question: Is lesson manageable for short-term teaching and analysis? Remember it is a lesson, not a unit.
- Communicate with each other.

DON'T'S

- Spend too much time selecting a topic.
- Be afraid to change teacher or student question.

Contacts and Resources to Help Get Started

OUSD Teaching American History Grant Website

<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.us/index.htm>, Stan Pesick, Project Director, 510 336-7584; stan.pesick@ousd.k12.ca.us

Lesson Study Group at Mills College

<http://lessonresearch.net/>

Lesson Study Research Group, Teachers College/ Columbia University

<http://www.tc.edu/lessonstudy/>

Lessons Studied: Lessons Learned - MacComb Intermediate School District

<http://www.misd.net/lessonstudy/process.htm#Introduction>

The Lesson Study Project at the [University of Wisconsin-La Crosse](http://www.uwlax.edu/sotl/lsp/) as part of the [Center for Advancing Teaching & Learning](http://www.uwlax.edu/sotl/lsp/).

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