

Lesson Study:

Building Connections through Lesson Study:

Across the K-12 Mathematics Curriculum, Teacher-to-Teacher; District-to-District

Our Story.....

Lesson Study is a powerful form of teacher-led professional development that requires teachers to be both reflective and public with their teaching practices. The unique lens provided by the Lesson Study process allows teachers to enhance their content knowledge as well as their pedagogical knowledge while collaborating with colleagues.

Our Lesson Study journey began in May 2007 when seven teachers attended the Lesson Study Conference in Chicago organized by Global Education Resources. During the conference we learned strategies for implementing this unique form of staff development and had the opportunity to see it in action. We left eager to implement the process and completed our first pilot in the 2007-2008 school year. During the 2008-2009 school year we expanded our work to include seven other teachers representing a total of 13 school districts in Northwestern Wisconsin. During that year we also completed a grant application successfully competing for a Wisconsin ESEA Improving Teacher Quality grant. We are now completing year two of this three-year process and our numbers have grown to include 14 districts and 29 participants.

Our approach to lesson study is unique. We have made it a priority to build connections across districts, grade levels and mathematics content. Groups are made up of K-12 teachers from varying grade levels. Often times work focuses on content that is out of the range of what individual teachers are currently teaching requiring them to move outside their comfort zones and confront topics and issues from a K-12 perspective. As one teacher stated at the conclusion of the pilot:

“Our version of lesson study which melds teachers from grades K – 12 and from small, medium, and large schools is truly the most unique professional development model I have ever experienced. The power of this process is its collaborative nature. It is learning and teaching at its very best. I can say without doubt that ALL members of this group have learned from one another and taught one another as we shared our insights, strategies, understandings and misconceptions, predictions regarding student knowledge, and our classroom experiences that are relevant to the topic in an open and productive forum. I gained a much deeper understanding of the chosen topic (fraction division) and have a wide variety of ideas from multiple perspectives regarding how best to approach and develop this topic in the classroom. The process celebrates diversity, validates multiple perspectives and empowers teachers” (email conversation, May 19, 2008).

As policy makers continue to search for the right ways to create effective change in education, Lesson Study serves as an excellent reminder of the potential to be found in listening to the voices of classroom teachers. With needed support, opportunities for collaborating with colleagues, and access to current research, teachers can make a difference! The following quote from one of our participants sums up the need for such a powerful form of professional development.

“Lesson study is easily the most beneficial professional development I have been a part of. Most professional development inservices/sessions usually seem designed to 1) make you feel good about teaching 2) give you a few items or ideas to add to your ‘bag of tricks’. What makes lesson study different, and in my opinion more worthwhile than other professional development I've been a part of, is that it makes you reflect on how you teach. I've found out that what I have been doing in some places could have been much better and in other areas I've been doing well.

“Often times professional development requires bringing in an expert to present to a group. One of the best things about lesson study is the opportunity to meet with teachers from other districts. Talking to them has been invaluable because . . . teachers are experts! We spend the most time with the students and have the most to share. I love that aspect of Lesson Study.

“It's commonly heard that, ‘people shouldn't go on diets, they should change their lifestyles’. I think most professional development feels a lot like a diet. You use something for a while, then forget about it, get tired of it, and it's over. Lesson study feels a lot more like a ‘lifestyle change’ because it changes the way you teach and even think. Like most things worth doing, it's a process that takes time.” (personal communication, April 2010)

Email addresses:

Michelle Parks, NBCT
CESA 10 STEM consultant
mparks@cesa10.k12.wi.us

Christopher S. Hlas, Ph.D.
UW-Eau Claire, Mathematics Education
hlascs@uwec.edu

Kate Masarik, Ph.D.
UW-Eau Claire, Mathematics Education
masaridk@uwec.edu

Lorna T. Vazquez, NBCT
CESA 10 consultant
lornatvazquez@gmail.com