LESSON STUDY

STEP by STEP

How
Teacher Learning Communities
Improve Instruction

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Build a Lesson Study Group

I would advise teachers who are just beginning to consider lesson study to forge ahead slowly. Lesson study is not something that one can “jump into.” Understand what it entails. Don’t skip any steps. . . . Understand that lesson study is about the process as much as it is about the lesson.

—NICK TIMPONE, TEACHER, HARLEM VILLAGE ACADEMY, NEW YORK CITY

In this chapter and the next few chapters, we turn our focus to the practical details of lesson study, providing information on each phase of the lesson study process, including how to:

- build a lesson study group (Chapter Three)
- focus the group’s inquiry, study the topic, and plan the research lesson (Chapter Four)
- conduct and discuss the research lesson, reflect on what has been learned, and plan next steps (Chapter Five)

Figure 3–1 provides an overview of the lesson study process, including the number of meetings (of forty-five to ninety minutes) needed for each phase of the process. Just how much time each phase will take depends upon your particular group—your goals, familiarity with each other and with lesson study, whether you have good curriculum materials appropriate to your goals, and whether your research lesson will be taught and revised once, twice, or three times.
Recruit Group Members

Figure 3–2 outlines some strategies for recruiting members of a lesson study group. Perhaps, like Jackie and her colleagues, you find the idea of lesson study appealing and will recruit like-minded colleagues through an open letter to district colleagues. Or maybe you already participate in a group that provides a natural start for lesson study—such as a grade-level group, book group, or subject
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<td>Build awareness, recruit volunteers.</td>
<td>With colleagues, read an article or book or watch a video on lesson study, in order to identify interested collaborators.</td>
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| Transform an existing group.                 | Groups in your district or region may provide a natural start for a lesson study group:  
  • Committees on curriculum, standards, assessment, etc. Research lessons can bring their ideas to life in the classroom, for others to see.  
  • Mentor teachers, coaches, or subject matter specialists. Research lessons provide a way to refine, spread, and examine their ideas about good practice.                                                                                                                                 |
| Reshape current work to include lesson study. | • Grant-funded work. Perhaps a funder would welcome an open house research lesson instead of the traditional final report. Public research lessons provide built-in accountability and can disseminate grant-funded work.  
  • Professional development credits. Rather than steer teachers toward individual coursework or one-shot conferences, how about making lesson study groups an option?  
  • Program quality review, school improvement plans, etc. Lesson study provides a structure for setting goals, improving instruction, and assessing student development.  
  • Pro forma reviews. Tenured teachers might be given the option of conducting a research lesson in lieu of current requirements (such as observation by the principal). |
| Contact local members of a union or subject matter organization. | Teachers’ unions and subject matter associations have been pioneers of lesson study (e.g., Dubin 2009). Science museums, schools of education, and other local institutions may partner to develop a lesson study group or network.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Find a school with a supportive mission.     | An existing or planned magnet school or professional development school could incorporate lesson study as a key operating principle.                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Gather your buddies.                         | Working with a few colleagues, start a small lesson study group, where you can learn together how to do lesson study. If your group builds and shares useful knowledge, interest and support are likely to follow.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Look online.                                 | Information about lesson study groups is beginning to be available online. You may be able to find interested individuals in your area by contacting a lesson study network, e.g., lsnetwork@mailman.depaul.edu.                                                                                                                                               |

**Figure 3-2 Strategies to Recruit a Lesson Study Group**
matter group—that is eager to strengthen its impact on classroom instruction. Successful lesson study efforts can also begin in a summer workshop, where teachers are able to try out lesson study outside the busy pace and demands of the regular school year. Ideally, lesson study should not feel like something additional to do; it should feel like a tool that enables one to work more effectively at the core learning within teaching—for example, learning to use a new curriculum to reach struggling learners, or to enact other current priorities.

Lesson study is most likely to be effective when integrated into other ongoing work, such as implementation of a new curriculum or standards, improvement of instruction in a particular area, long-term planning, or program quality review. Offering lesson study as an alternative way to meet an existing obligation (such as yearly review or professional development credits) recognizes that many teachers need something taken off their plates before they have room for something new. Or perhaps you want to form a group initially with just a few trusted colleagues who also enjoy the challenges of trying an emerging innovation. Whatever approach you choose, remember to be open and welcoming to curious outsiders. A sample first meeting agenda for groups new to lesson study is included in Appendix E to help you get started.

### Determining the Best Size and Makeup of Your Group

Optimal group size for planning a research lesson is probably about four to six teachers. But for activities like selecting your research theme, locating good research and curriculum materials, and observing and discussing lessons (particularly on the second or third teaching), you may benefit by working with other groups or invited outsiders.

For school-based lesson study, developing the research theme as a whole faculty provides a very important shared experience for teachers, connecting their work across the school, after which teachers can break into smaller teams to plan research lessons informed by the shared research theme. It is typical for teachers from one grade level or two adjacent grade levels to form a group (since this enables them to focus on a topic at a single or adjacent grade levels). However, groups may be formed in other ways, depending on a school’s goals. For example, teachers might form groups based on the particular subject matter they want to research (e.g., writing, mathematics) or the particular differentiation strategy they want to investigate. Cross-grade-level lesson study teams are a powerful way for teachers to understand how a concept develops across the grades. Lower-grade teachers can see the importance of their piece of the curriculum at successive grade levels. Upper-grade teachers can see how younger students learn particular concepts and can connect their own instruction of new concepts to the examples and models used in prior years.

For secondary schools, it is typically most effective to work with teachers who teach in the same content area so that you can build shared ideas about the important concepts, see how the curriculum fits together across years, and work together to deepen your knowledge of recent scholarship and teaching strategies in your shared discipline. However, interdisciplinary lesson study may also work well in certain circumstances. For example, teachers from several disciplines may work together to improve students’ writing or their strategies for comprehension.
A successful school reform network in Japan includes many junior high schools whose teachers work together across disciplines to build student attendance and connection to school, by reshaping instruction in all subjects to emphasize inquiry and collaboration (Lewis, Akita, and Sato 2010; Sato and Sato 2001). Teachers in different disciplines within a school use shared principles for analysis of instruction, such as whether a lesson elicits the thinking of all students, enables connections between the academic discipline and real-world issues, and so forth. If teachers collaborate across disciplines, it is important that all participants see the lesson study goals as important to their teaching, not as a “side trip” (Sisk-Hilton 2009) or distraction.

**Consider an Outside Specialist**

Another element that can greatly enhance lesson study is inclusion of an outside specialist, such as a teacher or researcher, who is highly knowledgeable about the subject matter under study, how to teach it, or both. It is often most effective to involve an outside specialist early on, so that the specialist has a chance to contribute ideas about the direction of the work, suggest curricular resources, and schedule time to serve as a commentator on the research lesson. "A Closer Look" highlights the role of the outside specialist in lesson study.

Though not required, an outside specialist may play a crucial role within a school and beyond. If you choose to use an outside specialist, make sure she understands the collaborative, student-focused nature of lesson study. You may want to share Figure 1–1 (page 7) with the specialist, in order to highlight the differences between lesson study and traditional expert-led professional development, and you will certainly want to share the guidelines for observation of a research lesson (Figure 5–1, p. 58). In lesson study, the role of the outside specialist is to raise questions, add new perspectives, and be a co-researcher, not to tell others what to do.

A subject matter specialist (from the district or a university) who meets with the lesson study group can help teachers quickly access relevant research, high-quality curriculum examples, and answers to subject matter questions. A subject matter specialist can greatly ease the work of teachers in pinpointing useful materials within the huge variety of purportedly useful Internet and print resources. However, the regular presence of a subject matter specialist (particularly one who quickly jumps in to help, and whom team members look to as an authority) can also keep teachers from doing certain kinds of learning.

Consider an exchange on the DVD “How Many Seats?” Teachers are anticipating student responses to the seats task, and one teacher suggests that students may arrange the triangle tables incorrectly (not in a row). Another teacher asks whether that will make a difference in the mathematical function that relates the seats and tables. They look to Jackie (who serves half-time as a mathematics coach), who responds, “I wonder if it makes a difference. Let’s figure it out.” Teachers then try arranging the triangles incorrectly, as they think students might. When some team members are about to conclude prematurely that the pattern always holds, Jackie makes what may be a crucial intervention, asking the question, “Will that always be true?” When subsequently questioned about their experiences during the lesson study cycle, several teachers commented that the experience of posing and solving a novel mathematics problem
A Closer Look: The Role of Outside Specialists in Japanese Lesson Study

by Tad Watanabe, Kennesaw State University

Professor Kenjo is an experienced mathematics teacher educator at a national university known for preservice teacher education. He is often invited to be an outside commentator on research lessons. He says that, as a rule of thumb, he tries to “praise ten and criticize one.” In other words, he selects one (or a few) important ideas to focus on and chooses not to dwell on other areas needing improvement. On those issues, he might say something like, “You have done this very well, but perhaps if you think about these ideas, you might be able to do even better.” However, on the issue he selects to focus on, he becomes much more critical and provocative.

Professor Kenjo says that when he is invited to be the outside commentator at an open house or research lesson that is more public in nature, he tries to focus on generalizing the main idea of the research lesson. The research lesson is conducted with a particular group of children with a particular teacher. Not everyone can duplicate what the teacher did. However, the outside commentator must, according to Professor Kenjo, generalize the good practices exemplified in the research lesson to assist the observing teachers to think about adopting the practices in their classrooms.

Occasionally, an outside commentator works more closely with a school or a group of teachers. In those situations, the same commentator will attend a number of research lessons conducted by the school or the group over an extended period of time. For example, Professor Saito has been working with Takuma Elementary School, a public elementary school in Tokyo metropolitan area, for more than a year. After a recent lesson study open house, which was attended by more than two hundred teachers from the Tokyo area and beyond, Professor Saito recalled what initial lesson study meetings were like. He said that during his talk, more than half of the faculty was either asleep or pretended to be. However, the principal and Professor Saito, along with the head of the school lesson study group, persisted. Today, all teachers at the school seem to have found joy and excitement in lesson study. During the two years he has been involved, Professor Saito shared his expertise and was also a cheerleader who encouraged the teachers to keep moving on. He even taught a research lesson himself.

As you can see, an outside specialist can play a number of different roles depending on the particular situation. However, one thing that is common to all effective specialists is that they pay attention to the audience and anticipate what they are ready to learn. An experienced teacher recently told me that an outside specialist is just like a teacher in a classroom. Just as a teacher must assess and act according to what students need, the outside commentator must do the same with the teachers who are attending the lesson study.
by themselves—based on a mistake they thought students might make—felt very significant. As one said, “I felt like we were in charge of our own learning.” Rather than answering the question, Jackie asked challenging questions that allowed team members to solve the question themselves.

There is no right or wrong answer to the question of whether to include a subject matter specialist. A subject matter specialist may quickly access high-quality resources, substantially enhancing teachers’ learning during the cycle. On the other hand, with a subject matter specialist present, teachers may have fewer opportunities to learn how to collect and explore resources, consult research, ask for help, and involve content experts without giving away all power to them. There are many intermediate choices between regular participation by a specialist and no participation. For example, some lesson study groups regularly work with subject matter specialists by email during curriculum study and have them visit as commentators at the time of the research lesson. Another possibility is to have a specialist recommend materials once the group has settled on a topic or to use a “lesson study tool kit” designed to support lesson study on a particular topic. Such tool kits have been developed for several topics in mathematics and include, for example, problems for teachers to solve and discuss, tasks to investigate student thinking, and research summaries. (See toolkit examples for mathematics at: www.lessonresearch.net/nsf_toolkit.html and www.lessonresearch.net/FRACTIONTK/fractions_toolkit.html.)

Develop a Shared Understanding of Lesson Study

However your group comes into being, the work of lesson study is likely to feel like a significant paradigm shift. It is important to create a shared vision for the work you are about to undertake. We suggest that you examine and share your ideas about effective professional development, acquaint yourselves with lesson study, and consider how the two fit together. You can do this by revisiting questions 1 to 3 of the “How Many Seats?” viewing guide in Appendix B.

A Learning Stance

Lesson study rests on the assumption that everyone takes a learning stance. It will be helpful for every group member—even ones who are coaches or “experts”—to bring genuine questions (not just answers) to the group’s work. Lesson study differs from mentoring or coaching in its emphasis on inquiry conducted by equals, and it provides an opportunity for even experts to pose and pursue questions about student thinking.

Shared Ownership and Responsibility

In their work together, group members should come to feel that the lessons are “our” lessons, not “your” lesson or “my” lesson. The point of lesson study is not to polish the skills of a few star teachers but to help all teachers grow and to create the interpersonal relationships, school culture, and personal and collective habits of inquiry that support continuing growth every day. Members view every participant as having something valuable to contribute to the group.
Emphasis on Students, Not the Teacher

Lesson study focuses on student learning and development. It provides a rare and valuable chance for teachers to be in a classroom solely to investigate student learning, unencumbered by the need to manage students or provide instruction. During a class discussion, a first-year U.S. teacher from Mills College (January 16, 2001) pointed out how lesson study differs from the lesson observation familiar to U.S. teachers: “In the United States, if you are being observed, it’s a critique of you. Lesson study focuses on student learning, on student ahas. It takes what we’re doing to a more professional level.”

Agree on Expectations from Group Members

What contributions will you expect from group members? Some lesson study groups form with the understanding that not all members want to teach a research lesson and that no one will be pressured to do so. Others expect all members will take a turn. It makes sense to discuss these expectations up front.

Another important practical step is to define the work roles needed for productive functioning of your group. Typical roles might include:

- a facilitator, who leads the group through the agenda, eliciting participation from all group members and actively monitoring the group norms
- a note taker, who records and distributes notes that summarize discussions and capture important decisions
- a recorder, who writes on chart paper or the board information that needs to be kept in public view (e.g., the results of a brainstorm or the sequence of steps in a lesson)
- perhaps a timekeeper or a convener, who reminds the group of upcoming meetings and makes arrangements (room, refreshments, etc.)

Once the lesson plan is under development, it may be useful to add a role: updating and circulating the lesson plan. Some groups have also added the roles of “researcher” (tracking down research as needed) and “summarizer.” Taking a work role helps team members feel responsible for the learning of other participants as well as their own learning. (This list of lesson study group roles can also be found in Appendix F.)

Permanent or Rotating Facilitator?

Many lesson study groups have team members rotate roles each meeting, a practice that ensures that team members gain experience with different roles. Another alternative is to have a single designated facilitator throughout the lesson study cycle. The strengths and trade-offs of each choice are probably clear: a single designated facilitator (particularly if trained and given time for the job) may become a very helpful “go-to” person for materials, information, and problem solving, helping the group make steady progress. On the other hand, rotating facilitation may build shared responsibility and leadership among all team members and may give quiet members a chance to build their comfort in leadership roles.
When lesson study groups have an appointed facilitator who takes responsibility for keeping the group organized and moving forward, teachers may save time and energy and experience lesson study that feels efficient and productive to all team members. This may be a very good way to begin lesson study. However, teachers can learn to perform all of the roles needed for effective group management, and, in the process, learn important skills that help them work as professionals. Teachers who manage their own lesson study effort (using the rotating roles described in the preceding section) learn, for example, how to set up a timeline and carry out work over an extended time period, how to work with other adults and to listen to their ideas, how to ask for help, how to collect and analyze data, and how to document, synthesize, and present what has been learned. It is no doubt more challenging for teachers to assume all the responsibilities of managing the lesson study cycle—but it also may provide richer opportunities for teachers to develop leadership.

Whether a permanent or rotating facilitator is used, it is worth taking some time to consider what is “good” facilitation. Rebecca Pittard of Volusia County, Florida, in her sixth year of lesson study, says that a good facilitator makes sure everyone feels valued and heard, and lets conversation flow around the key questions and tasks of lesson study, bringing it back only when it strays too far afield.

**Develop Group Norms**

In some forms of professional development, it is possible to remain anonymous, revealing little about one’s own teaching practices, beliefs, or content knowledge. By contrast, lesson study is intimate. Teachers must cross classroom boundaries to take a shared look at student learning and to examine the impact and effectiveness of particular lessons and instructional strategies. As they do so, they must reexamine their own beliefs about teaching and learning. Because lesson study requires teachers to venture beyond their own comfort zone, it is wise to develop group norms that will enable members to learn.

A good way to develop norms is for each member of your group to think about how groups have succeeded or failed in supporting their learning in the past, and then share ideas about the important qualities of a professional learning group. (See Appendix G for a summary of this process.) Teachers in a lesson study group in Fresno, California, searched their individual experiences and came up with the following norms (agreements) for their lesson study work together:

- Listen thoughtfully, with an open mind.
- Share the air.
- Give 100 percent!
- Stay on task.
- Be punctual.
- Have a positive outlook toward self and others.
- Be student-focused always.
Update Group Norms

Development of one’s own content knowledge is an obvious part of one’s development as a teacher, so it is important to consider norms that will support your academic learning. After several years of lesson study work together, a group of teachers at Willard Middle School in Berkeley, California, added a norm of challenging each other’s thinking: “Show respect for each other’s ideas . . . yet challenge!” As this example illustrates, norms can be revisited and changed as a group develops; good norms are the ones that continue to improve the work of your group, enabling you to support one another’s learning. “A Closer Look” reveals the power of choosing one norm (or more) to monitor at each meeting and discussing at the end of the meeting whether it was upheld.

A Closer Look: Sticking to the Process

In the video clip “Sticking to the Process” (see the Additional Segments section of the accompanying DVD), Jackie and her lesson study colleagues discuss the norm “Sticking to the process” that they have chosen to monitor that day. Several team members remark that they found the meeting confusing, because many ideas were discussed without clear decisions being made on them. To avoid this problem, the group agrees that, in the future, the facilitator will elicit everyone’s opinion on ideas under discussion and will call for an explicit decision to be made. The final section of the video clip shows the group putting this decision into effect the next day, when the new facilitator asks that group members clarify their decision about one idea before moving on to discussion of the next idea. We think this video clip illustrates how, by monitoring and discussing norms, lesson study groups can hone their processes for working together, creating a more effective set of collaborative practices. When we first embarked on lesson study, some U.S. educators predicted that lesson study could not be practiced outside the collaborative culture of Japan. “Sticking to the process” shows how U.S. educators can build a collaborative culture within a lesson study group.

Make a Time Commitment and Set a Schedule

Schools are busy. If you can, schedule times in advance for lesson study meetings for the entire school year so that you are not interrupting the work of each meeting to schedule the next meeting. Creating a schedule for the year also enables you to know when you will need substitutes and, perhaps, outside content specialists. Setting aside lesson study time up front will help protect the natural rhythm of the work even when teachers’ lives become hectic. Many U.S. lesson study groups schedule two or three lesson study cycles during the school year, avoiding busy times such as holidays and assessment periods. Advance schedul-
ing is particularly useful in the case of a schoolwide lesson study effort, in which various components, such as a faculty meeting to talk about long-term goals, lesson study team meetings, and research lessons all need to be coordinated. (Figure 3–3 provides a sample one-year schedule.)

**How much time does lesson study require?**

It may be possible to conduct a lesson study cycle in as little as eight to ten hours, but most groups prefer to spend at least twice that much time. Figure 3–1 (page 30) shows a breakdown of the time within the cycle. If possible, groups should commit up front to do at least two lesson study cycles, because the process usually becomes more comfortable and useful with experience. Two or three lesson study cycles during a school year is typical for a lesson study group.

| Meeting 1 | Develop hypotheses about differentiation: What student needs for differentiation do we currently meet well, and what needs remain?  
Select a “dirty” lesson to observe that will provide baseline data on differentiation needs. (“Dirty” lesson means no special planning.)  
Identify data you will collect during the lesson to investigate your group’s hypotheses about differentiation needs. |
| Meeting 2 | Discuss information from the district professional development day on differentiation.  
Finalize plans for data to be collected during the dirty lesson. Teach, observe, and discuss it before Meeting 3.  
Refine the goals for your research lesson based on what you learn about differentiation from the dirty lesson. (Suggest using a half-day sub.) |
| Meeting 3 | Begin planning the research lesson. |
| Meeting 4 | Continue planning the research lesson.  
Read and discuss any further research or curriculum materials you need to inform your planning. |
| Meeting 5 | Finalize planning and write-up of the teaching-learning plan for the research lesson.  
Teach the research lesson before Meeting 6.  
Use a full-day sub for teaching, observing, postlesson discussion, and write-up of what you learned from the lesson. |
| Meeting 6 | Prepare the results of your research on differentiated instruction to share with the staff. |
| Meeting 7 | Hold a staff meeting to share out the results from all of the lesson study groups.  
This plan utilizes only one and a half of the sub days. You will still have a half of a sub day for observing another research lesson. |

**Figure 3–3**  
Sample Plan for Schoolwide Lesson Study
During or After School?

Lesson study meetings can take place either during or after school hours. Because the research lesson itself includes students, it generally takes place during school hours and requires the observing teachers to be released from their own teaching responsibilities for the period of the lesson. (Some schools arrange in advance for one class to stay after school.) Another way to free up one class for a research lesson is to integrate your lesson study plan with a scheduled ongoing schoolwide activity (such as an art or literacy project, community service project, or science fair) that students participate in regularly over the course of a year, with just the students from the research lesson class missing this activity on a rotating basis. Often such activities can include parent and community volunteers, specialist teachers from outside the school, artists in residence, or other adults who can free up classroom teachers while providing a vital learning experience for children. Books like *At Home in Our Schools* (Developmental Studies Center 1994) provide suggestions for such schoolwide events.

Meetings that include just teachers from one or two grade levels may be scheduled during a common planning time or at a time when the principal or assistant principal can teach these classes. This can be a wonderful opportunity for school or district administrators to demonstrate their commitment to teachers’ professional development and retaste the flavor of classroom life!

In “A Closer Look,” principal Lynn Liptak notes that scheduling of lesson study depends upon making clever use of the existing resources, such as non-classroom teachers, support services, departmentalization, student lunch time, administrators, and so forth. The guiding principles behind scheduling are to maintain high-quality instruction for students and to schedule lesson study in a way that will permit it to become part of school culture.

In contrast to Paterson School No. 2, the San Mateo lesson study groups initially met after school, but they conducted research lessons during school hours, using substitute teachers to cover the classes of planning team members who were observing the lesson. Over the course of their work, many San Mateo groups found ways to integrate group meeting times into the school day, by repurposing staff meeting time and using district-mandated professional development days. For after-school meetings, a modest stipend was provided from grant funding from sources that varied over the years, including district funds targeted for math and science professional development and grants from private foundations. (Foundation funding also included support from The Noyce Foundation for teacher-coaches in mathematics and small grants from the Spencer Foundation and Kabcenell Foundation.)

Optimal Time Between Meetings

An optimal schedule includes weekly meetings for a ten- to fourteen-week lesson study cycle, with two or three lesson study cycles during the year and breaks from lesson study at busy times of year. Within each lesson study cycle, it is optimal to revise and reteach the research lesson at least once if feasible. However, we have seen successful lesson study efforts that use meetings spaced two to four weeks apart (good note taking and distribution are essential to allow members to remind themselves quickly about what went on at the prior meeting) or that have
A Closer Look: Scheduling Lesson Study in an American School

by Lynn Liptak, Principal, Paterson School No. 2, Paterson, New Jersey

The following principles were considered in developing a lesson study schedule for School Number 2, Paterson, NJ:

• If lesson study is going to become part of the school culture and conducted over a long period with a goal of gradual improvement, then time must be allocated during the school day. Lesson study has no chance of becoming a prevalent feature of the school culture if it is conducted with a few enthusiastic volunteers working after school.

• Time is one sure measure of commitment. When teachers see serious time committed to lesson study, and the administrators taking time to engage in lesson study, they feel confident of a high level of support for the process on a day-to-day basis and over the long haul.

• Lesson study should be scheduled by reallocating currently existing resources. In our school, it does not rely on “soft” money or the hiring of substitute teachers.

• Quality instruction must be provided in the classroom while the teachers are engaged in lesson study.

Time for lesson study is thus built into the regular school day using non-classroom teachers and preservice teachers. Each classroom teacher is paired with a nonclassroom partner teacher. The partner teacher has contact with the class during the week by teaching during teacher preparation periods, downsizing the class for mathematics or reading, or tutoring individual students. It is the responsibility of the partner teacher to know the students and become familiar with classroom routines. In the event of absence, the partner teacher helps to orient the substitute and assist, as needed, with the class. The partner teacher often teaches the class while the classroom teacher engages in lesson study.

During the first cycle of lesson study, it was apparent that the two-hour weekly meeting was only “seed” time. Once we began to collaborate on lessons and test out ideas in the classroom, we did not wait until Monday to continue the process. Email communication and discussions before and after school, during lunch periods and preparation periods are common. Most important, these discussions and observations are focused on how our teaching impacts student learning. We know from research and our own observations that grade-level meetings and school management team meetings rarely focus on the lessons that occur daily in the classrooms.

For too long, in my view, professional development time in the United States has been allocated to outside experts to “train” teachers, rather than given to educators to reflect collaboratively on their practice. We need to tap outside expertise; we need to improve our content and pedagogical knowledge. But the professional development process needs to occur in the context of our classrooms and be driven by professional practitioners. Lesson study—it’s about time.
met intensively over two to five days of whole-day meetings (for example, during a summer workshop or grouped professional development days). Bill Jackson, an experienced U.S. lesson study practitioner (Lewis 2002, p. 48) gives the following advice about scheduling lesson study:

It is important for teachers to understand that lesson study has a definite beginning and ending. Too much time spent in a cycle can be counterproductive. . . . Teachers should understand that since lesson study is not about making a perfect lesson, a semirigid schedule is needed.

Scheduling research lessons in advance for particular dates during the year—rather than waiting until you feel completely “ready”—can speed up your progress, much the way a deadline can catalyze work on other projects. Likewise, scheduling in advance the second teaching of the lesson can streamline the lesson revision process. The research lesson needs to be discussed soon after it is held (preferably on the same day). Intervals between other lesson study events need to be given some thought. In Japan, reteaching generally occurs soon after the original lesson (within a few days or a week), and some U.S. schools follow this practice. Other U.S. schools choose a longer interval (for example, two to three weeks) before reteaching. Bill Jackson, formerly a teacher and mathematics coach at Paterson Public School No. 2, noted that teaching the lesson the first time often highlights gaps in students’ prior knowledge, enabling the lesson study group to identify basic concepts to be firmed up in lessons taught before the teaching of the revised lesson. Like the teachers at Paterson Public School No. 2, you will want to adjust your second lesson study cycle to reflect what you learn the first time around. The sooner you do an actual research lesson, the sooner you will be able to learn from the process.

A sample timeline from Highlands School (Appendix H) illustrates the power of setting a timeline for the whole lesson study cycle. Additionally, the meeting protocol that was established by Highlands teachers to help their groups function efficiently and stay on course is included in Appendix I. Alice Gill, director of mathematics professional development for the American Federation of Teachers, recommends that you set a date for the research lesson and stick to it, even if you don’t feel ready. She notes that we can never be perfectly ready and that observing students in action provides a valuable stimulus for insights into student thinking, which become the basis for continued improvement of teaching.
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