

# Preface

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## PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Lesson study is a professional development practice in which teachers collaborate to develop a lesson plan, teach and observe the lesson to collect data on student learning, and use their observations to refine their lesson. It is a process that teachers engage in to learn more about effective practices that result in improved learning outcomes for students.

Interest in lesson study, which has a long history in Japan, has been growing rapidly in the United States since publication of the results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) video study and *The Teaching Gap* (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Many people have seen its potential to change teaching practice and improve student learning, but educators who are using and adapting the Japanese lesson study model face a number of challenges. It is not easy to change old models of professional development and organize schools into places where teachers can learn. Schools need materials that provide extensive examples, models, strategies, and tools in order to facilitate lesson study.

The purpose of this book is to provide a detailed account of the lesson study process. It depicts how teachers in the United States are bringing lesson study into their schools, and it will help educators envision lesson study in their own professional lives. The content is also intended to describe the substance of lesson study—not just the process, but the big ideas and habits of mind that drive the creation of professional knowledge.

The strategies, tools, and examples are designed to make lesson study a more tangible process because it is new territory for most U.S. educators. This concrete approach is not intended to be prescriptive or to define how all lesson study teams should go about their work. Instead, it is a place to start and a means of helping teachers begin to work out how to engage in lesson study for themselves. By presenting a step-by-step process, the tools that support it, and examples that bring it to life, this book is intended to help readers to gain an understanding of what it means to collaboratively plan a lesson or to engage in a discussion about student learning during the debriefing.

Teachers starting out with lesson study often find that it is more difficult than they first anticipated. As Sonal Chokshi and Clea Fernandez (2004) point out, “Lesson study is easy to learn but difficult to master” (p. 524). As a result, teams often begin with the help of technical assistance providers and university faculty. Yet many schools do not have access to specialists who can provide the necessary guidance. Even schools that start out working with a lesson study expert may find that they struggle when this support is no longer available.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

The book is designed to meet the needs of a variety of people. For those who are beginning to learn about lesson study, the book will provide a detailed walk through the process. Members of new lesson study teams will find information that will help guide them through unfamiliar territory. More experienced teams will find new routes and new perspectives on more familiar terrain. Administrators who want to get lesson study started in their schools will also find the book useful.

This resource is likely to be most helpful to people who are working with lesson study teams in the role of facilitator. There are many different people who can take on this role. Teachers who have become experienced lesson study practitioners can branch out to become facilitators for new lesson study teams. Instructional coaches and professional development providers might work with multiple teams in a school or district. When no outside facilitator is available, a member of the lesson study team can also fill this role.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT

The process used to develop this book reflects the collaborative spirit of lesson study. The coauthors worked together to plan and develop the content, exchanging ideas and drafts in an iterative process. Like a lesson study team, the group benefited from the expertise that each member brought to the endeavor and were able to build on their collective ideas and experiences.

The lesson study cycle is the primary organizer for the content of the book. There are chapters devoted to each phase of the process. Additional chapters address the issues around supporting, getting started, and sustaining lesson study.

### Chapter Descriptions

Chapter 1 provides an overview of lesson study and the rationale for engaging in the process. Readers can use the information in this chapter to help make the case for lesson study in their school or district.

Chapter 2 describes the supports that are necessary for lesson study, such as time for collaborative planning, administrative support, and committed teachers. The chapter also suggests how to put the necessary conditions in place and how to develop a lesson study action plan.

Chapter 3 provides tools and suggestions for sharing responsibilities, scheduling meetings, and creating the necessary group dynamics. The first phase of the lesson study process also begins here, with identifying the research theme or long-term goal.

Chapter 4 guides the lesson study team through the planning process. Strategies and tools are provided to make this phase of the lesson study cycle as concrete and explicit as possible.

Chapter 5 describes the observation and debriefing phase of lesson study. In particular, attention is given to the challenges of setting up and engaging in an effective debriefing.

Chapter 6 is intended to guide and enhance the revising and reteaching phase. Teams will find strategies and tools to help them use the information from the observation and debriefing to revise the lesson plan.

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Chapter 7 will help readers to reflect on their work and to develop a research lesson report. It also provides suggestions for evaluating the lesson study process, both formatively and summatively.

Chapter 8 provides suggestions for sustaining lesson study and dealing with the coming and going of team members. It includes strategies for bringing more teachers into the process, as well as ideas about how to enhance lesson study practice over time.

**Common Elements**

Within the chapters, there are a number of recurring sections. The purposes of these common elements are described below.

**From Our Team to Yours.** Advice from the Detroit Lesson Study Group is included at the end of each chapter. This team of five teachers has created a thriving lesson study practice in their district. They share their experiences and practical advice with readers.

**From the Field.** Sections labeled “From the Field” are real-life examples from teachers and others involved in lesson study. These sections are intended to highlight the knowledge and advice of experienced practitioners. They also illustrate the process and substance of lesson study.

**Challenges.** Many of the chapters include a section devoted to “Challenges.” This section is used to examine common dilemmas that lesson study teams encounter, as well as to provide some suggestions and questions that may help reframe the problems and create solutions.

**Reflecting and Assessing Progress.** This section includes questions that are intended to be used by lesson study teams as they complete each phase of the cycle. It is a time to identify and reflect on the learning that has occurred and to think about the team’s lesson study practice. The questions are designed to make the team’s work and learning more intentional and substantial.

**Moving On to the Next Phase.** Following the “Reflecting and Assessing Progress” questions, the chapters close with a section about the final steps of the phase. The purpose is to briefly describe the primary outcomes of the lesson study phase and to identify the artifacts that teams can gather to document their work. These artifacts will be used in Chapter 7 to create a lesson study report.

**Suggestions for Readers**

Readers are likely to use the book in different ways, based on their needs and their familiarity with lesson study. The following are some suggestions for different audiences.

- **For readers who are new to lesson study:** It may be helpful to begin by reading Chapter 1 and then skimming through the other chapters to get a feel for lesson study. A second, more careful reading is likely to be more meaningful with a big-picture perspective.

- **For experienced teams and other practitioners:** The most efficient way to begin may be to look through the book for the tools and examples that can be used immediately. Alternatively, a closer reading may uncover ideas for improving lesson study practice and maintaining momentum.
- **For teachers who are engaging in lesson study for the first time:** After their first reading, teams may find it helpful to refer back to specific sections of the book. Reading the appropriate chapter at the beginning of each phase of the lesson study cycle will provide perspective on the work ahead.
- **For people who are interested in launching lesson study:** Administrators and others who are interested in getting lesson study started will find the most useful information for their immediate needs in Chapter 2.

Each chapter ends with an overview of the “Key Ideas” presented within the chapter. These are intended to reinforce some of the most important points and to give readers a few ideas to think about as they continue reading.

Lesson study involves a number of concepts and terms that may be unfamiliar to readers. When an unfamiliar word or phrase appears, it may be helpful to check the Glossary. The glossary terms are highlighted the first time they appear in the text.

For the most part, the examples and tools are embedded within each chapter. The tools can be copied directly from the book, but readers are also encouraged to enhance and adapt them. There are a few longer examples that appear at the end of the book. Resource A includes three sample research lessons, and Resource B is a set of Frequently Asked Questions about the planning process. Sources for more tools, examples, and information about lesson study are listed in Resource C: Additional Resources.

For information on lesson study professional development services, visit the Web site at: [www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org), or contact Kit Peixotto at [peixottk@nwrel.org](mailto:peixottk@nwrel.org) or 503-275-9594 or contact Barbara Youngren at Learning Point Associates ([barb.youngren@learningpt.org](mailto:barb.youngren@learningpt.org) or by phone at 800-356-2735).

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