

Chapter 41

Teachers as Researchers and Instructional Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Professional development is a necessity for teachers in the K-20 system. To achieve effective teaching, teachers must be engaged in learning. On the job training and professional development provide learning opportunities for professional teachers in K-20 education. To achieve the most authentic professional development, students should be part of the learning process as they are part of the instructional equation. In order to promote lifelong learning of adults, teacher training needs to arise from problems and interests found in their practice. In this chapter, the author discusses Japanese Lesson Study (JLS) as a method for teacher professional development in the area of English Language Arts with emphasis on Situated Learning Theory as a necessary emphasis for teacher learning in K-20 classrooms. Connections are made to the National Common Core Standards as teachers compete globally to prepare students for success.

INTRODUCTION

The education of children and adults is a continuum of lifelong learning as they engage in thoughtful study throughout their lives. The release of the National Common Core Standards is changing education at all levels. At the local, national, and international levels standards are similar, allowing for educators to share lesson plans at all levels.

Student engagement is at the core of learning and for the first time educators can share what lessons have allowed for substantial growth and interest in student learning.

With the release of the Common Core Standards comes an opportunity for continuous and stimulating professional development of teachers. Due to economic downturns, school districts are now searching for ways to educate teachers using

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cost effective methods. Japanese lesson study, with learning situated in the classroom with students, would allow for the study of effective instruction. Teachers could work together to consider goals for student learning and long-term development while identifying gaps between those long-term goals and current reality.

Lesson Study as a method of professional development has had a long-standing history in most Japanese elementary schools dating as far back as the 1900s (Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokski, 2003). Lesson study differs from traditional professional development in that teachers bring their own pressing questions to the table. Participants in a lesson study group seek out answers from one another and from careful study of students during a lesson that is taught in a classroom (Lewis & Hurd, 2011). Students are part of the learning equation. Teachers are afforded opportunities to work with colleagues to bring standards to life in actual lessons, while carefully studying student thinking.

Staff development is critical to improved student learning, therefore collaboration and dialogue among colleagues is essential. Staff development sessions are ideal places to encourage lifelong learning and promote district learning goals so that all teachers are on the same page. Arnold (1995), in a discussion of faculty development, noted that traditionally most staff development methods were based on the assumption that teachers have little to offer and result in little engagement with what teachers already know. This passive method of learning has been criticized for use with adult learners. Adults come with experiences and past teaching knowledge that would supply others with background knowledge related to instructional practices found in the classroom setting.

Through the constructivist approach, teachers can collaboratively dialogue and share ideas for classroom practices based on their experiences (Arnold, 1995). Constructivist and dialogic conceptions of learning would suggest that staff developments should capitalize on the participants' beliefs and knowledge about instruction based on

their professional experiences as teachers (Scanlon, Gallego, Duran, & Reyes, 2005). Coined from the words of John Dewey (1963), the term social constructivism describes the interrelationship between the psychological and social sides of education. The role of a community, be that a school or a group of teachers, is to help learners construct knowledge. Dewey posited that learning was idea-based, and that the generation of new ideas was a product of a group anticipating knowledge together (1902/1990). He also noted that adult learning is most effective when adults recognize relevance and immediate applicability in their learning. Dewey inspired educational Progressivism suggests active learning while promoting community, cooperation, and democratic equality (Labaree, 2005; Heibert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). Learning from and through experience is at its core, while focusing on what the individual brings to the task such as motivation, belief systems, and prior life experiences is essential to the progressive inspired community.

Knowles (1980) tells us that adults have a vast set of experiences that should be tapped into at all stages of the learning process, including planning and evaluation. Adult education practice involves trusting the learner and acknowledging their experiences and ideas which facilitate their growth when applied to newly learned knowledge (Guglielmino, 1993). Student learners, in turn trust the instructor, and depend on them for experiences which foster their growth and inspire continuous learning. Effective staff development programs should give learners opportunities to develop new understandings through personally meaningful learning experiences (Barnett, 2004). Acknowledging the learners' past experiences when planning faculty development is grounded in progressive educational theory and is essential for promoting collaboration and community.

Effective methods of professional development afford teachers the opportunity to learn in context. It is often noted that students learn best when taught in the context in which their knowledge

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