



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A Michigan Middle Start Partner Organization

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Promising Practice: Lesson Study

Lesson study is a professional development approach which originated in Japan and is now gaining credibility in the U.S. as a powerful way to improve teacher practice and student learning. Lewis, Perry and Hurd (Educational Leadership, Feb 2004) note “the visible features of lesson study—well-designed processes of goal setting, research lesson planning, data collection, discussion, and revision—are essential to lesson study.”

Careful study of available protocols (Lewis, 2002; see also www.tc.columbia.edu/lesson and www.globaledresources.com) will help U.S. educators understand that these lesson study activities differ fundamentally from lesson planning and observation as we commonly know it. In a setting where the foundation for collaboration and content study is already well established, careful implementation of the visible features of lesson study may gradually and naturally build learning pathways. But where the foundation is not set, educators should make a point of creating those learning pathways themselves.

Increased Knowledge of Subject Matter

Lesson study begins by examining existing textbooks and standards

(Lewis, 2002; Yoshida, 1999). Teachers discuss the essential concepts and skills that their students need to learn, compare the concepts’ treatment in existing curricula and consider what the students currently know and how they will respond to the planned lesson. As teachers engage in these activities, they naturally generate many questions about the subject matter. The group can often answer such questions; if not, the teachers look to outside resources.

Increased Knowledge of Instruction

Much of what teachers learn during lesson study applies to areas beyond the particular lesson and subject matter. Teachers describe many effective strategies they learn that have broad instructional implications, such as carefully working the main problem to propel student interest, making students “hungry” for new terminology, and seeing how students use their prior knowledge.

Increased Ability to Observe Students

During the research lesson, one lesson study team member teaches while the remaining team members collect specific data, which generally

include detailed narrative records of the learning of several students—what the students said and wrote, how the students used the materials, what specific supports encouraged understanding, and what obstacles to learning arose during the lesson.

Stronger Collegial Networks

Lesson study can help build a community of practice in which teachers routinely share resources and ideas. Ideally, the interpersonal bridges built during lesson study enable collaboration well beyond the research lesson, increasing the coherence and consistency of the learning environment.

Stronger Connection of Daily Practice to Long-Term Goals

U.S. educators are often surprised to find that lesson study in Japan usually begins with an overarching question, such as “what kind of people do we hope our students will become?” Lesson study addresses students’ long-term development—their eagerness to learn, for example, or their concern for others—as well as the content of a particular lesson or unit. In a 5th grade research lesson entitled “Can You Lift 100 Kilograms?” (Mills, College Lesson Study Group, 2000), Komae teachers gathered a wide array of data, not just on how students’ thinking about levers progressed during the lesson, but also on whether students had “shining eyes,” “exclaimed under their breath,” and included the quietest students in the discussions.

Stronger Motivation and Sense of Efficacy

Elmore (2000) argues that U.S. education suffers not from a lack of

good programs but from a lack of demand for them. Successful lesson study efforts build grassroots demand among teachers for improvement. Lesson study can also strengthen the belief that improvement in teaching is possible. One teacher commented that lesson study puts a professional component back in teaching that is generally missing and treats teaching as a science that teachers can analyze and improve.

Improved Quality of Available Lesson Plans

Teachers share their learning—not just their lesson plans—when they share evidence about the success of their lesson study work. If lesson study is to avoid the graveyard in which so many other once-promising innovations are currently buried, then U.S. educators must understand that lesson study means far more than just walking through a set of specific activities. It means building a set of pathways that enable continual growth of the knowledge, interpersonal resources, and motivation required to improve instruction in the classroom.

A Deeper Look at Lesson Study
taken from Educational
Leadership/February 2004

For a copy of the full article, call
MSIM at 989-774-7678

MSIM can also provide professional
development to help you engage in
lesson study.

The logo for "Think Spring!" features the word "Think" in a multi-colored font (T: blue, h: orange, i: green, n: red, k: purple) and "Spring!" in a solid blue font. The text is set against a background of stylized green grass blades.



Leadership Lifeline

JUST DO IT!!

Rick DuFour contends that three qualifications often used by administrators to justify inaction are the need for greater buy-in, more training, and stronger relationships.

WE NEED MORE BUY-IN

School leaders have become increasingly sensitive to the need to build consensus rather than impose their personal will on reluctant teachers. Consensus is indeed a powerful tool in the improvement process. It gives leaders the moral authority of the group both to proceed with the initiative and to confront resisters. Some leaders, however, have confused consensus with unanimity. They feel they must have everyone on the school improvement train before it can leave the station. There is always one more group or individual to be converted before they are willing to take action, and as a result, nothing changes.

If leaders are unable to achieve the threshold of a clear consensus, then they should pilot the initiative on a smaller scale with a willing group of participants. The pilot project is an action step, albeit a small one, to advance the concept in the school, but even a small step is better than standing still.

WE NEED MORE TRAINING

DuFour asks that we imagine two school leaders, each of whom believes the best hope for a significantly improved school requires organizing teachers into teams to clarify essential learning outcomes, to create common assessments, to clarify the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student learning, to establish goals, to analyze student achievement data, and to identify and implement strategies to improve upon results. Imagine, too, that teachers in both schools are willing to create and participate in this collaborative team structure. The first principal sees the need for extensive training before he can ask teachers to begin working in teams. They will need training in writing curriculum, creating tests and rubrics, analyzing data, and developing goals prior to going forward—and that training will take years.

The second principal organizes teachers into teams immediately, asks them to initiate the collaborative processes described above, and provides training and support as teachers

approach each task. They are not learning how to write common curriculum as an abstract exercise, they are fully engaged in the team process and receiving just-in-time training to assist them. Once again, we learn by doing, not by talking about doing. The best form of advanced training in school improvement is *doing* school improvement.

WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

DuFour relates the story of two friends who are tennis enthusiasts who took very different paths in learning to play tennis. John would drill for hours with a tennis professional—practicing forehand, backhands, volleys, overheads, lobs, serves, drop shots, top spins, and slices. He rarely played matches because he wanted to perfect his strokes before competing. Bob took a few lessons to become familiar with the basics and periodically attended a clinic, but he spent most of his time playing matches. He would challenge a more skilled opponent and ask for advice and feedback after each defeat. Ten years later, John has still never beaten Bob, even though his strokes are far superior. While John focused on perfecting the pieces of the game, Bob played the game in its context and, as a result, became more proficient, knowledgeable, and confident in his ability to overcome adversity.

The same is true of those seeking to improve schools. Developing isolated skills or dispositions outside the context of the improvement process is no substitute for engaging the process.

Leaders of effective professional learning communities are action oriented. They turn aspirations into action and visions into reality. Not only do they act, they are unwilling to tolerate inaction. They recognize that learning always occurs in a context of taking action, and they value engagement and experience as the most effective of teachers. Even seemingly chaotic activity is preferred to orderly, passive inaction.

Taken from *Leading Edge*, NSDC Winter 2003. By Rick Dufour



Coaches Corner



Each month we feature one of our Comprehensive School Reform/MSIM Coaches. We are very proud of our coaching staff and like to share some information about each one with you.

Our featured Coach for this month is Carol Powell. Carol is keeping busy as a leadership coach for three schools: Pinconning Middle School, Richardson Middle School in Oscoda, and Standish Sterling Middle School. She lives in West Branch and has taught for several years in West Branch Rose City Area Schools. She has also served as an instructor at Kirtland Community College in Roscommon.

Carol has a Bachelor of Science degree from Eastern Michigan University and Master of Arts degree in School Administration from Central Michigan University. In addition, she has completed graduate coursework in Learning Disabilities and Talented and Gifted Education.

Carol has made presentations at MAMSE, Summer Leadership and MEA State Conferences and at the National Middle School Association Conference. She has also been involved in *Eyes to the Future* as Program Director. In 1998, Carol received a State Excellence Award from the Michigan Association of School Boards.

We appreciate Carol's enthusiasm and passion for middle school student success! Her participation in additional training as an academic coach will expand her leadership skills and expertise.

Thanks, Carol, for your fine work!



Student Station

Building Community

If you're like most people, you have a small circle of friends with whom you spend most of your time. And, if you're like most people, this circle of friends is made up of others who are a lot like you. This only makes sense; after all, you are likely to choose friends who are about your own age, who have the same interests and values you have, and who live close enough that you can spend a lot of time together.

Do you ever reach out beyond your circle of friends? For example, do you talk with kids older than you, or participate in activities with them? Do you mentor younger children? Do you spend time getting to know the elders in your community, or the person who cuts your hair, or your bus driver? What about people whose skin color is different from yours, or those who follow different religious beliefs?

Often, differences in age, culture, or social status keep us separated from other people. We may think, "Oh, what could I possibly have in common with that person?" Or, we may be afraid that we will say or do something that offends a person who seems different from us. In extreme cases, we may even grow to hate or fear groups of people who are "different." We often find it much more comfortable to stick with people we know.

But, if you surround yourself only with people who are like you, what do you miss out on? What kind of wisdom might an older person have that she could pass on to you? What interests or hobbies might you share with someone whose skin happens to be a different color from yours? What hopes and dreams do you have in common with people whom you normally wouldn't notice? If you look beneath the surface, you will find that most people share some interest, goal, dream, or experience with you.

Does this mean that you should turn your back on your friends and start hanging out only with people who are different from you? Not at all! Your circle of friends can be as big as you want it to be -- you can keep the friends you already have, and add to your circle. After all, no one can have too many friends!

So, try it! Talk with your bus driver, your barber, your grandparents, or the kid from the "other side of the tracks" who sits next to you in class. Find out what you have in common. You may be planting the seeds that will bloom into friendship.



Student Book Review

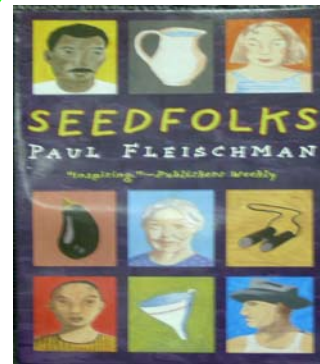
Seedfolks

Author: Paul Fleischman

Look around you -- at your school, at your neighborhood, at your community. What do you see? Are there places or things that you find beautiful or interesting to look at? Are there places that you find ugly? Do you sometimes wish that you could transform a drab or ugly place into something beautiful?

Seedfolks is the story of a group of people in Cleveland who band together to turn a neighborhood eyesore into a blooming community garden. It starts when a nine-year-old girl named Kim cleans up a small section of a trash-filled vacant lot so that she can plant some lima beans. As Kim's beans sprout and then grow into tall, strong plants, other people in the neighborhood start clearing more spots in the vacant lot and planting their own gardens. Wendel, a school custodian who lost his son in a drive-by shooting and his wife in a car wreck, finds comfort in working the earth; Curtis, a muscle-bound gym rat, hopes he can win back the heart of his ex-girlfriend by growing tomatoes for her; Sae Young, who has spent two years hiding in her apartment after being mugged and badly beaten, learns to trust people again in the garden. Many people in the neighborhood work in the garden, and others watch them and encourage them. One woman even comes up with a clever way to get the City to clean all the trash out of the lot so that the gardeners can work.

The stories of thirteen people who are involved in working, watching, or helping the garden are related in *Seedfolks*. At first, these people think they have nothing in common with each other. Some are young, some are old; some are retired, some are employed; one is homeless; they are Vietnamese, Caucasian, Guatemalan, African-American, Haitian, Korean, Puerto Rican, and Indian. As you read each story, you will see how their lives change, and how their shared interest in the garden teaches them to talk to one another, help one another, and care about each other. You will see how *community* can be built in the most unlikely places.



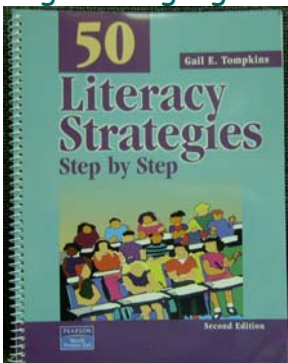
***Be sure to pick up
A good book today!***



Resource Review

50 Literacy Strategies Step by Step ***Author: Gail E. Tompkins***

In this useful guide, literacy expert Gail E. Tompkins outlines fifty research-tested literacy strategies which can be used in elementary- and middle-level classrooms. Each strategy is presented in concise step-by-step format, preceded by a brief overview of the strategy and followed by an example of student work and a short list of references. The strategies are arranged alphabetically for easy reference, and each strategy includes a grid which identifies its most appropriate grade levels, classroom configurations, and pedagogical uses. In addition, strategies which are most effective for English language learners are identified.



Perhaps one of the most helpful aspects of the book is the chart on the inside front and back covers, which lists the strategies most useful for accomplishing a variety of instructional objectives. For example, if a teacher is interested in looking at strategies which could be helpful in teaching Content-Area Reading, he/she could refer to the chart for a listing, and then could look up each strategy in the book for more information. In addition to Content-Area Reading, charted topics include Assessment, Background Knowledge, Comprehension, Explicit Instruction, Fluency, Graphic Organizers, Listening, Phonics, Reading, Reading-Writing Comprehension, Response to Literature, Spelling, Study Skills, Talking, Visual Representation, Vocabulary, and Writing.

Check out this helpful guide today! Call the Center at (989) 774-7678, and ask to check out Resource # CALA-60.



Teacher Topics

Reciprocal Questioning

As content-area teachers, most of us are constantly on the lookout for promising strategies to help our middle-grades students improve their reading comprehension. One promising strategy is Reciprocal Questioning, summarized by Gail Tompkins. (See this month's Resource Review for a synopsis of the book *50 Literacy Strategies*.)

Teachers use Reciprocal Questioning to involve students more actively in reading and understanding informational texts. One specific type of reciprocal questioning is termed ReQuest. ReQuest involves pairing students and chunking the textbook or other informational reading (much the same as in the Cooperative Learning strategy "Say Something"). Student pairs then read silently the "chunk" assigned and ask each other questions about the text they have read. Students are encouraged to move beyond factual questions to think more deeply and critically about what they have read. This is an especially important aspect of the strategy because of the importance of helping students use higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

Types of questions that students ask during reciprocal questioning include questions that relate the text to students' own lives; "I wonder why" questions that go beyond the information provided in the text; and questions that require students to locate information not contained in the text. Tompkins reports that "students read more purposefully when they read to create questions and prepare to answer questions than when they read independently to finish an assignment."

The success of ReQuest is dependent upon the teacher modeling good questions for the students. Once students can identify powerful, thought-provoking questions they are more able to comprehend difficult text and engage in deep conversations around their learning.

Taken from *50 Literacy Strategies Step by Step* by Gail E. Tompkins



will be here soon



Family Focus

Practice Makes Perfect

Indeed, that's what homework is all about. But homework can be a hassle for middle schoolers who are driven by hormones and distracted by just about everything. It seems young adolescents often complain that homework is too stupid, too easy or too hard.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Together we can help your child develop the discipline and determination to achieve harmony with homework. Good homework habits can help your child through middle school, high school and beyond.

Remember, your child's homework is not yours. But it is your responsibility to create an environment in which achievement and discipline are valued.

So, don't worry if you've forgotten history or algebra. You don't need to understand your child's homework to underscore the importance of doing it and doing it well.



Here are some ways to make homework work:

- Maintain a united front with your child's teachers. This encourages honesty and accountability.
- Provide a quiet, well-lit area where you can monitor—but not hover over—your child.
- Set aside 30 to 90 minutes for reading or other educational activities, regardless of homework.
- Do your own homework—balance your checkbook, wash dishes, read a book—during your child's homework time.
- Take the whole family on educational outings to museums or cultural events. It shows that you enjoy learning, too.
- Help your child set--and meet--realistic homework goals. Time management skills are especially important with complex and long-term assignments in middle school.
- Mark important due dates on a calendar and remind your child of deadlines.
- If your child performs poorly on a test or assignment, first praise what was correct. Discuss what could be done differently next time.
- Remind your child regularly about what he or she does well.
- Celebrate success, but don't pay for good grades.
- Be willing to help with homework. But do not do it for your child.

Taken from *Surviving the Middle School Years*, MEA Parent Project

Resource Highlights



AA-46	Educating Hearts and Minds: Social Emotional Learning and the Passage into Adolescence - Cohen
IS-88	Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking - Costa
MS-49	Best Practices from America's Middle Schools - Watson
TI-5	The Educator's Brief Guide to the Internet and the World Wide Web- Provenzo
ISV-31	Impacting Teaching with Brain Research (Video) Video Journal of Education

Do you need the resources you checked out longer than you anticipated? Just give us a call and, if no one is waiting for them, we will renew them for you. Our phone number is 989-774-7678 - ask for Bryan.

If I had my child to raise over again

If I had my child to raise all over again,
I'd build self-esteem first and the house later.
I'd finger-paint more, and point the finger less.
I would do less correcting and more connecting,
I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes.
I would care to know less and know to care more.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites,
I'd stop playing serious and seriously play.
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do ore hugging and less tugging.
I would see the oak tree in the acorn more often.
I would be firm less often and affirm more often.
I'd model less about the lover of power,
and more about the power of love.

Dianne Loomans



R.A.C. Reading Across the Curriculum

MSIM has been conducting Reading Across the Curriculum professional development with many middle-level schools across the state. Toby Kahn Loftus is the facilitator for this work which helps teachers in all content areas identify and implement reading strategies to improve reading comprehension. Below are some of the comments from teacher participants in the RAC program.

- I have learned many new reading strategies and had the chance to use and practice them in my classroom. This has been by far the best and most useful class I have ever taken. I am motivated to try new and better things with my students and have been affirmed in my beliefs about the importance of reading aloud and SSR. Thank you so much.
- Excellent workshop...the chance to learn strategies and then go work on them with the students then come back and process with my colleagues. Great strategies! Toby, you were a great facilitator, easy to work with.
- I have found the reading strategies helpful. Many of the activities helped challenge the better readers in my class and helped give the lower readers success. Thank you very much!
- This whole series just affirmed how many great ideas there are out there to try in my classroom.
- I am anxious to try a lot of these ideas! I am still getting familiar with the materials & curriculum. I think these ideas will help me build on that.
- My teaching was affirmed in some ways: reading aloud, SSR and shared reading. I would like to create some units on specific areas in my content using some of the strategies. Thank you.
- This affirmed my belief of the importance of reading time in class. I'm ready to try a variety of new ideas.
- Today I really enjoyed the jig-saw activity. I think that the selected reading hit home for a lot of us. Overall I have liked over 40 reading strategies & look forward to organizing all my notes for my graduate credit.

RAC is professional development over a period of time. It consists of 4 days of in house professional development, spread out with time in between sessions to practice new strategies. There are 5 follow up days in the school. The participants receive much valuable information and many books and resources.

For more information about R.A.C. for your school, call MSIM at 989-774-7678.

“Powerful Quote”

**“Think of all the beauty still left around
you and be happy.”**

Anne Frank, (1929 – 1945), *Diary of a Young Girl*, 1952

Contact us:

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