

Misconceptions About Lesson Study

#1 Lesson Study Is Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is just a **small** part of lesson study. The larger process includes formulating long-term goals, studying student responses to an actual lesson, and revising the approach to instruction.

#2 Lesson Study Means Writing Lessons From Scratch

The focus is on improvement not creation. The less writing from scratch your group does, the more time you will have to anticipate student responses, study student work, and refine the lesson so that it works for your students.

#3 Lesson Study Means Writing A Rigid “Script”

The basic idea underlying lesson study is that the content, wording, and presentation of a problem or activity can affect student learning. Japanese teachers recognize that a lesson is a “swiftly flowing river” in which many decisions must be made in the moment, and the departures made from a lesson plan often yield important insights for improving a lesson.

#4 Lesson Study Is Writing The “Perfect” Lesson to Be Spread to Others

Because the world is diverse and constantly changing, there is no guarantee that a particular lesson is right for all students in all schools, or that it will continue to work well with future students. Because children’s lives are changing, lesson study never ends.

#5 The Research Lesson Is a Demonstration Lesson or Expert Lesson

Something striking about lesson study is the co-equal status of all participants. Roles are rotated so that all participants learn together as equals, rather than one participant acting as mentor or leader. Despite the differences in experience that may occur in a group of teachers, it is assumed that every member will have something important to contribute to lesson study, be it a fresh pair of eyes that someone new to teaching brings, or years of experience.

#6 Lesson Study Is Basic Research

The term “lesson study” could equally well be translated as “lesson research” or “instructional research” However, lesson study differs in two important ways from most US educational research (and even from some action research). First, the primary goal of the lesson study is not to generate knowledge that others will apply as opposed to other US educational research. Second, lesson study examines an active improvement effort, not just any idea or question. The point of lesson study is not to isolate particular variables and study their effects individually, but to practice all the qualities thought to comprise good teaching. In a traditional research model, research is applied to practice. In lesson study, practice is research.

***Just as “mistakes are a natural part of learning” misconceptions about lesson study are a natural product of efforts to understand lesson study and bring it to life.¹

2

¹ Adapted information from Lewis, C. (2002). Lesson Study A Handbook of Teacher-Led Instructional Change. Research for Better Schools Inc. Philadelphia, PA.