



Bill Jackson, left to right, meets with Ronna Bachman, Heather Crawford, Sunjoo Kim and Joe Adriulli.

Lesson study invigorates math coach — and his school

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Eight years ago, curiosity changed the course of Bill Jackson's professional life.

The classroom teacher became transfixed by the Japanese process of lesson study, eventually becoming the facilitator for the process in his home school and one of the most notable proponents for lesson study in the U.S. Much of his value as an advocate for lesson study comes from his ongoing, on-the-

ground experience as a teacher who coaches other teachers in the process in his school, Paterson School No. 2 in Paterson, N.J.

"The point of lesson study is not to teach one great lesson. It's to transfer all of what you've learned about teaching into all of your teaching," Jackson said.

"Lesson study shows me how I can help other teachers in a more powerful way. It reduces the isolation of teachers and fosters collaboration

between teachers. It provides a common understanding of teaching practice and promotes a consistency of teaching throughout a building. It shows a teacher how to become a high-quality teacher over time,” he said.

Jackson’s journey into lesson study and teacher leadership began in 1997 when he was a classroom teacher at School 2 and accepted an invitation to join a math study group started by the school’s then-principal Lynn Liptak.

The math study group attended workshops on the TIMSS videotapes of math classrooms and Jackson was intrigued by the Japanese style of teaching which he thought was more powerful than his own instruction. Working from what he had observed in the videotapes, Jackson tried to imitate what he saw happening in those classrooms, not really understanding the process that the Japanese teachers had gone through to create the lessons he observed.

Soon, the math study group learned about lesson study, the intensive professional development process that Japanese teachers use to improve classroom lessons. Through researchers at Columbia University’s Teachers College in New York City, School 2 teachers were able to connect with teachers from Greenwich (Conn.) Japanese School, a relationship that continues to this day.

Jackson greatly values the relationship with the Greenwich teachers. “That’s the best professional development for me. Working with them is how I stay sharp,” he said.

When the work with Greenwich began, Jackson was one of 16 teachers who volunteered to spend some time every week developing and refining math lessons. “I was one of the very enthusiastic lesson study participants. When teachers were afraid to teach publicly, I volunteered. I was never shy about that,” he said.

By the 1999-2000 school year, the principal had seen enough to convince her to carve out time to enable the volunteer teachers to meet from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. every Monday in lesson study groups. Two years later, all teachers were expected to participate in lesson study groups 80 minutes each week. Jackson became math facilitator with his primary work to guide the lesson study groups.

Jackson continues as the school’s math facilitator but, because of a districtwide change in school schedules, School 2’s principal was unable to provide time during the workday for teachers to participate in lesson study. A small group of volunteer teachers is continuing the process after school.

Until this year, School 2’s goal had been to develop at least one research lesson per year per grade. Teachers worked in grade-level math groups and selected lessons that they’d had difficulty with in the past or which they knew had caused students to struggle. Eventually, one of the teachers volunteered to teach the lesson to students with other teachers observing. The observers followed a precise protocol. Teachers gathered after the lesson to debrief what they had observed. Then, the same teachers refined the lesson. The lesson was re-taught, using the refined lesson. After teaching the lesson a second time, teachers once again met to discuss it. Finally, they wrote a report on what was learned during that lesson study cycle. Teachers presented these reports with PowerPoint at staff meetings. The reports with lesson plans, discussion notes, conclusions and recommendations along with videotapes of the lessons are stored in the library.

In addition to facilitating the lesson study groups, Jackson also provides intensive support for teachers. Rather than observing an occasional lesson here or there, he observes every math lesson taught by one teacher during the school’s 90-minute math block over a one- or two-week period. “They teach. I observe. We talk,” he said in describing the process.

That process, he said, is ideal because teachers are not teaching special lessons but allowing him to observe their everyday practice. This also allows him to have frequent short but timely debriefings.

In addition, Jackson teaches model lessons while other teachers observe. That also is followed by a debriefing about the strengths and weaknesses of his lesson.

Changes in School 2 and the district have presented Jackson with new challenges this year. Teachers are no longer required to participate in lesson study and teachers who are interested in

Benefits of lesson study

→ It shows me how I can help other teachers in a more powerful way.

→ It reduces the isolation of teachers and fosters collaboration between teachers.

→ It provides a common understanding of teaching practice and promotes a consistency of teaching throughout a building.

→ It shows a teacher how to become a high-quality teacher over time.

— *Bill Jackson*

WILLIAM JACKSON

Position: Mathematics facilitator/teacher, Paterson School No. 2

School district: Paterson (New Jersey) Public Schools

Professional history: Before becoming math facilitator at School 2, Jackson had been a classroom teacher for 17 years, teaching grades 3 through 8 as well as bilingual education and adult ESL classes. At School 2, he has been the lead teacher in the school's lesson study work. He has managed the school's lesson study relationship with the Greenwich (Conn.) Japanese School. He also has

co-authored the math curriculum for grades 7 and 8 at his school, based on the findings of the TIMSS study and what Paterson teachers learned about student learning through their work with lesson study.

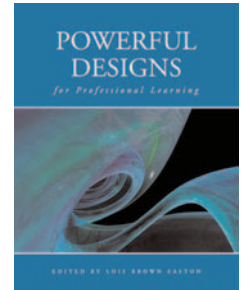
Education: Earned his bachelor's degree in economics from Rutgers University, 1982 and a master's degree in education with a concentration in bilingual/bicultural education, William Paterson University, Wayne, N.J., in 1997.

Honors/accomplishments: Awarded Fulbright Memorial Scholarship by the government of Japan to study the Japanese educational system

in Tokyo and Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, 1999. Member of select group of educators to represent the United States at U.S./Japan Mathematics Seminar in Park City, Utah, July 2002.

Professional service: Jackson is an active participant in the lesson study work in the United States. He presents frequently at mathematics conferences regarding lesson study and is a regular participant in the lesson study conference hosted by Greenwich (Conn.) Japanese School.

To continue this conversation, e-mail Jackson at wjjack@optonline.net.



Lesson study is one of the 21 strategies featured in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*. Buy it at store.nsdc.org

the process must join a voluntary after-school group led by Jackson, who's also volunteering his time. He believes that lesson study made a profound impact on the culture of the school and was beginning to impact student achievement.

"Conversations have changed. It's real common for teachers to say, 'come look at my blackboard. I want you to see my students' work.' It literally has transformed the feeling in this building," Jackson said.

"At my school, teachers don't have to know everything. We know that we can learn to be good teachers. But, first, we have to let our guard down," he said.

But he worries that these improvements will fade if administrators don't make their support more tangible. "It's very easy to slip back into the same old same old. That's what I'm struggling with right now. Without support, you're a Lone Ranger," he said.

"You need administrators who let the staff know that this is part of the professional lives of

teachers in this school. There was a time when lesson study was 'the way we do business' in this school," he said.

Jackson also worries that the American tendency to favor a quick fix is out of step with a learning process as intensive as lesson study.

"Americans have little patience for anything that doesn't produce immediate results. Lesson study produces slow but steady improvement over time," Jackson said. School 2 made AYP in 3rd and 4th grade but "the test scores didn't jump through the roof."

Without commitment from the district, he wonders how long he'll be able to share his passion for lesson study with other teachers at his school.

"If you're not getting support from the top, I don't see how this can work long-term. You hear a lot about lesson study being teacher-driven. I'm not sure that's true. It's teacher-driven if teachers are allowed to drive it," he said. ♦

"Americans have little patience for anything that doesn't produce immediate results. Lesson study produces slow but steady improvement over time."