Graduate School of
EDUCATION

EDU 580: Inquiry Into Practice III
Lesson Study Cycle 3: Literature Synthesis

"*Once you can name something, you're conscious of it. You have power over it.*

You're in control. You own it." - Robin P. Williams

Belonging in the classroom is a human right. This idea dares to challenge the status quo of education as it presently stands in the United State: A system built on passivity, defining resistance, social change, and academic student success on its own terms. A system whose sole purpose is institutionalizing people to accept their proper station in life. The lesson study team shared a common vision in seeing their roles as educators with a passion and responsibility that transcends any job title. This team sought out transformative ways in which our students could fundamentally change the society in which they live; a constant battle with oppressions such as classism, xenophobia, and homophobia that permeates and impairs our society. Lorena Germán (2020), a Dominican American educator focused on antiracist and anti-bias work in education advocates for the importance of promoting student voice and how it connects to social justice efforts.

Germán offers guidance in helping students encompass their role within society by validating their roles as potential change agents. In doing so, educators encourage students' opinions on current events that lead students to encounter self-derived correlations between past events and contemporary issues. In her article, Germán states, "There is power in student's voice, and it isn't a voice any teacher can give. We don't give voices. We make space for them in our curricula and classrooms, or we don't." The lesson study team envisioned the following equity theme: "How will we increase students' development of academic language and confidence to share out?" To help support the equity theme, the lesson study team researched and sought ways to build confidence in academic language by making students a key component of social justice teaching. We used design choices that catered specifically to students' needs of expression and centered student's voices. During the research the following themes emerged:

1. Intellectually and socially safe learning environments
2. Culturally inclusive and non-biased Instruction
3. Academic identities

Intellectually and Socially Safe Learning Environments

Due to the nature of the current state of the world and online learning, we discovered that each of our classrooms faced a low turnout of participation and collaboration that includes: turning on video, audio functionality, and chat communication. Upon further research and analysis, the team agreed that our equity goal should revolve around students' development of academic language and confidence to share out. The lesson study team sought to add a variety of low-stakes participatory activities that would help our classrooms increase participation through the sharing of knowledge, engagement of concepts, and building upon those ideas. In our research, we found that by incorporating student heritage and funds of knowledge, students will feel important enough to share whilst promoting comfort and empowerment (Gérman 2020).

In our lesson study, our opening sequence was our first attempt at implementing low-stakes participation that would enable students to share knowledge and build comfort with the concepts we would review. Our opening question included a question that asked students which locally-based fast-food joints that all our students had at least heard of or been to once had the best fries. The opening question also included a variety of pictures and allowed a variety of voices to be expressed: via chat, unmuting, video, and direct private messages. The students were also prompted to practice their knowledge of rhetorical persuasive techniques to defend their choice of 'favorite fries'. This activity included no judgment for the responses, welcoming all students to share. This contributed to the opportunity for a lot of participation from students to get warmed up and activate their minds.

For students to fundamentally change the society in which they live teachers must know their real needs and assets. We must seek to understand our students as whole persons: their languages, neighborhoods, and histories. We believe that every school space should reflect relevance to students' lives. Within the context of the classroom, this begins with the language we use when talking with our students. Students reflect back to us what we think of them. This is evident when students willfully won't learn from us until they know we are genuinely invested in them and what they truly care about. If we think that students exhibit brilliance, it will manifest within them. If we think students aren't capable of it will manifest in them as well. Belief in our students, in correlation to understanding and deep connections, is essential for truly meaningful engagement.

Culturally Inclusive and Non-Biased Instruction

As an educator, it is my responsibility to inculcate the importance of education and its power to transform the lives of my students. We sought strategies to implement convincing essential questions that would invite student interest and curiosity. Additionally, we provided a space to unpack difficult social constructs in a way that genuinely encompasses a student's unique learning journey. Jessica Singer and Ruth Shagoury (2005) outlined a framework to teaching a diverse population of adolescents to be writers, readers, and active citizens.

Singer and Shagoury advocate for fundamental changes in curriculum development, teaching strategies, and roles in the classroom. One of those concepts included involving mariginalized

stories and voices to revolve around the central theme of social activism. Leading up to the lesson study, my curriculum incorporated Latin American and African short stories that exposed students to issues of family, identity, and immigration. Additionally, the students read multiple texts about marginalized groups in the United States that included those in the Civil Rights Movement. To amplify these opportunities for student insight around their own internal bias or perspectives, we identified important concepts of action, identity, diversity, and justice within the issues and organizations we researched together prior to the lesson study. In the lesson, I modeled the concept map they would be working on by personalizing my own map based on my volunteer work with a social activist group (Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities). This informative map amplified the rapport I have with my students by reflecting on what specific details in my map meant and inviting my students to be comfortable in the work they were about to commence. Inviting students to create these mind-maps and analyzing rhetoric within them in a reflective, and structured environment, opened up opportunities for students to develop their own critical voice. In their own maps the students were able to dissect elements of past and contemporary social justice movements, and the ways they use rhetorical techniques to showcase a particular, often marginalized point of view. Our intention with this lesson was to amplify an already developing community of activists aspiring for equity.

Academic Identities

Our team journeyed together in this lesson study in hopes of creating a lesson that would inevitably change how we develop all future lessons. These hopes led us to research topics that would be relevant to our students' lives, enhance collaboration and participation in the classroom. Our theory of action was developed specifically to the themes noticed in our team research such as how to implement convincing essential questions that will invite student interest and curiosity (Social Justice Standards ND). Another important aspect of directly addressing assimilationist practices that encourage the youth to de-identify from their culture was to include issues and subjects that are not often inquired about in public school classrooms. These issues have been purposefully chosen to fit my students' needs after months cultivating multiculturalism and multilingualism.

By supporting students in learning their own values and loving themselves, our culturally sustaining practices take a deeper effect. Students will choose academic success if we provide culturally relevant content and universally design learning for all students in our classroom. This was evident in how invested students were in choosing a social activist issue and organization to create an action plan for. Our content goal also cultivated an environment for students to be able to choose academic success: Students will use their knowledge of persuasive arguing to understand the three elements of rhetoric (ethos, pathos,logos) to become a more effective writer and passionate community memberI am a firm believer that to inculcate the importance of education, my humanities classroom must implement consistent literacy-rich experiences with culturally relevant texts that include indigenous peoples, resistance through identity, rebellion, immigration issues in the U.S., social movements across the globe, gentrification, and texts proposed by the students. In this lesson study students had the ability to choose an issue and

an organization that was personally important to them. They had a lot of choice in terms of what they wanted to contribute to, creating an environment that is intellectually and socially safe for learning under the guidance of my students' unique strengths and identities.

Conclusion

By learning our histories, traditions, and struggles, we reclaim our identities, enabling all students to see themselves reflected in what they learn. My students come from culturally rich backgrounds and experiences to which they can share and collaborate with one another to enact the separation of social capital from the classroom. As a lesson study team we felt that our equity goal and theory of action amplified students voices and enabled them to use academic language confidently in a a variety of academic rigor. Students had the opportunity to reactivate prior knowledge that tells a different narrative than the status quo of the current systems. This precious knowledge equips our students with the necessary critical thinking skills to survive, enabling a sense of responsibility toward their own communities. Although the lesson was a success in our minds, other questions to further research include creating brief yet important context/backgrounds of why some of these organizations are important. Organizations and issues such as YANO (Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities) are significant to communities of color, especially Chicanx communities. Additionally, further questions exist in creating clear learning objectives and the language we use to invite students such as: "By the end of this lesson you will. . ."   My focus will remain to inspire my students to be empowered by their cultures, histories, and identities. In turn, they will rise up, speak out and restore the achievements of prior generations and fundamentally change the society in which they live.

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