

Lesson Study, Cycle 2: Literature Synthesis

How do we foster a sense of belonging and solidarity to enhance students' self efficacy as readers and writers in a way that allows them to feel empowered to use their voice?

The process of becoming an educator goes beyond teaching content. There is no manual or single guide that prepares you for the complexities of being a classroom teacher. The decision to become an educator is a decision to become a lifelong learner and a decision to do the self-work required to be present in an authentic, open-minded and with an open heart. Throughout our Lesson Study, much work and preparation went into our plans. The preparation included empathy interviews, conducting research, creating lesson plans, executing the lesson and much more. In reflection and debrief of our lesson study, I thought about the pre-work that occurs with your students way before lesson study and the relationships that are built. The relationships that are built with

1. with teacher and self
2. teacher and student
3. and student to self

When looking at my team's Equity Theme: *How do we foster a sense of belonging and solidarity to enhance students' self efficacy as readers and writers in a way that allows them to feel empowered to use their voice*, I think about how fostering that sense of belonging goes beyond the lesson study time frame. For students to feel a sense of belonging and solidarity with their peers, or to feel empowered and confident to use their voice, I think of the steps that need to take place starting at the beginning of the school year.

The relationship with teacher and self

Beginning with self reflection, an educator must be able to look at their own identities and be comfortable in their own skin before asking students to be comfortable with themselves. According to Hammond (2014), "we each must do the inside-out work required: developing the right mindset, engaging in self-reflection, checking our implicit biases, practicing social-emotional awareness, and holding an inquiry stance regarding the impact of our interactions on students" (p.53). Being self reflective allows you to leverage diversity within your classroom. Knowing who you are, where you come from, what triggers you; are the critical first steps for teachers to understand how their own cultural values shape their expectations in the classroom and shape their relationships with their students. When researching excellent teachers of African-American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) found that the common thread amongst those successful teachers was how they strongly identified with teaching and how they identified themselves as members of the communities they taught. They also shared commonalities in how

they thought about themselves as teachers and how they thought about others , i.e, their students, their student's parents and other community members. When students feel seen, heard and cared for as learners by an emotionally conscious, culturally responsive teacher, they then feel the confidence needed to show up in ways that allows them to feel empowered to be academically successful. The following are questions educators can ask themselves in preparing to become a culturally responsive teacher (Muhammad, 2021).

**Questions for Further Consideration:
Teachers and Preservice Teachers**

1. Who am I?
2. Which ideologies and social conditioning have shaped my knowledge and perspectives of people of Black and Brown children?
3. How can my instruction authentically respond to my students' identities?
4. How do I focus on the beauty and brilliance of children in my class?

The relationship with teacher and student

When reflecting on my own education, I often think of how teachers made me feel and those classrooms I felt safe to speak up and participate in. I think about those teachers I had poor relationships with because they made me feel ashamed for not knowing something or they didn't understand why I struggled academically. They never asked about my life, never took the time to get to know my cultural background, or to get to know me as a person. Students want to be valued and to feel connected to their learning environment and their teacher. High-quality relationships between students and teachers have academic and social benefits. Truly understanding your students and their cultural backgrounds allows for students to feel safe, promotes risk-taking such as participation and to care about their own learning and the learning of others. Keeping the relationship between teacher and student fluid and equitable, meaning students sometimes take on the role of teacher and teachers take on the role of student, encourages students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for each other's learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This is how we foster a sense of belonging and solidarity to enhance students' self efficacy that allows them to feel empowered to use their voice, even in a small group as in our Lesson Study.

The relationship with student and self

According to Muhammad (2021), our students must be able to tell their own stories and those stories and identities must begin with positivity and excellence. Teachers should seek to help students understand their identities because it helps them to see their own positionality and stances in the world and across socio-political issues. It is important for children to know who they are and to learn about the identities of others different from them as it prepares them to live joyfully in the world, even when the world tells them negative things about who they are. Per Ladson-Billings (2009), to have a strong knowledge of one's own identity, students are prepared for active citizenship and armed with the tools to critically analyze society and critique social norms, values and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities.

Lesson study reflections

In completing this lesson study, I have come to understand the importance of all the pre-work that must take place for students to feel confident as learners, to feel confident in speaking up and in being active participants in the classroom. It is important that we take the time to understand our own cultures and backgrounds as educators, that we get to know our students and provide them with the opportunities, information and education for them to learn about themselves and that we build strong bonds with our students in order to achieve academic success.

Reference List

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