



# How many peer reviewers does it take to revise a thesis?

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# Some Assumptions



- Focus is on student understanding (vs. memorization, rote learning, etc.).
- Student understanding is not necessarily evident in ordinary classroom activities or assignments—hence the need for systematic inquiry.
- Knowledge is socially constructed.
- Using a peer review process, teachers may work together to draft and revise lessons just as students draft and revise papers.

# Background on Lesson Study

*In Japan, teachers improve their teaching through "lesson study," a process in which teachers jointly plan, observe, analyze, and refine actual classroom lessons called "research lessons". Lesson study is widely credited for the steady improvement of Japanese elementary mathematics and science instruction. Since 1999, lesson study has rapidly emerged in many sites across the United States. (<http://www.lessonresearch.net/>)*

**<http://www.uwlax.edu/sotl>**



# The Lesson Study Process

Teams of instructors

1. formulate goals for student learning and long-term development;
2. collaboratively plan a "research lesson" designed to bring to life these goals in a *single learning episode*;
3. conduct the lesson, with one member teaching and others gathering evidence of student learning and development;
4. analyze the evidence gathered during the lesson and use it to improve the lesson;
5. may teach, study and revise the lesson a second time;
6. write a report that describes the lesson, analyzes data about student learning and discusses what was learned.



# Our goals

- Help students revise their essays—particularly their thesis statements—through critical thinking and rhetorical understanding
- Encourage critical conversations between students as writers/readers
- Foster an awareness that writing involves the discovery and development of ideas, involving learning for writers/readers

# The “Lesson”



- “Workshop groups”—a small group of students meets with the instructor to discuss work in progress
- Workshop focus is finding and discussing main idea of the draft.
- Given the recursiveness of writing and individual differences among students, it is challenging to design a lesson about a discrete writing issue.
- Qualitative research (no lab coats)

# Round One



- Students are assigned to write a critical essay on issues of space, place, and community.
- Prior to the assignment, students had lessons on thesis statements, specific language, and audience awareness.
- In preparation for the workshop, students write and exchange drafts. For each draft, each reader answers a workshop questionnaire to provide written feedback.

# Student #1



- The workshop seemed productive for this student, providing her with good suggestions—although most came from the instructor.
- The student was already demonstrating proficiency in key writing areas (e.g. getting started, organizing and developing ideas).
- Capable of applying feedback from the workshop, she earned an “A” on her final revision.
- Workshop video clip

# Student #2



- The workshop seemed less productive for this student.
- “Did it seem like I was making a point? I’m not very good at writing, actually.”
- Although he received productive feedback, the process did not lead to significant improvement of ideas or revision in his final draft.
- Workshop video clip

# Preliminary Findings



- The students with the highest abilities seemed to benefit most from the process.
- “Average” students were not engaging in critical conversations and revising their papers to the extent we had hoped.
- Students were struggling with the subject matter itself as well as how to write about it.

# “You mean I have to rewrite the whole essay?”

- Students seemed to think they were near the *end* of the writing process when in fact they were *just starting*.
- Students did not seem to understand that writing is, among other things, the discovery and development of ideas.
- When students did focus on ideas in their workshops, they did not necessarily transfer what they learned to their writing.

# “You mean I have to rewrite the whole *lesson*?”

Based on the above findings, we decided to

- Lower the stakes for the first workshop, focusing more on invention (draft plan vs. first draft)
- Specify a rhetorical context in the essay assignment prompts (purpose and audience)
- Change the essay topic (education vs. space, place and community)



# Round Two

- Workshop video clip
- Initial Impressions
  - A wider range of students benefited from the revised lesson.
  - Students seemed more willing to
    - develop ideas based on feedback and further thinking
    - share ideas and suggestions, even bold ones
  - Many students stated that the workshop approach was useful, valuable and worth continuing.

So, how many peer reviewers does it  
take to revise a thesis?

At least 7

4 students

+

3 teachers

+

as many peer reviewers are in this room