

Teaching Improvement Profile Example

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What is a Teaching Improvement Profile?

Teaching, “like other forms of scholarship, is an extended process that unfolds over time. It embodies at least five elements: vision, design, interactions, outcomes, and analysis” (Shulman, 1998).

1. Vision: the instructor’s goals that specify what students ought to learn and develop.
2. Design: the design of assignments, exercises, and experiences intended to make the goals come to life.
3. Interactions: the enactment of teaching and learning in the classroom, engaging students with the subject matter through discussion, lecturing, problem solving, collaborative work, exercises and assignments
4. Outcomes: The acts and products of student learning consisting of changes in understanding, skills, competencies, propensities and sensibilities.
5. Analysis: the interpretation and analysis of how and how well students learn from the experience.

Lesson Study is a teaching improvement process in which a small group of instructors jointly designs, teaches, observes, evaluates and revises a single class lesson—called a Research Lesson (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998; Stigler, & Hiebert, 1999). Because it embodies all five elements of teaching—vision, design, interactions, outcomes and analysis—lesson study is an ideal context in which to document teaching improvement. This Teaching Improvement Profile provides evidence and analysis of, and reflection on Lesson Study activities.

Lewis, C., & Tsuchida, I. (1998). A lesson is like a swiftly flowing river. *American Educator*, 22(4), 12-17; 50-52.

Stigler, J.W., & Hiebert, J. (1999). *The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world’s teachers for improving education in the classroom*. NY: Free Press.

Shulman, L. (1998). “Course Anatomy: The Dissection and Analysis of Knowledge Through Teaching.” In Pat Hutchings (Ed.). *The Course Portfolio: How Faculty Can Examine Their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

This teaching improvement profile explains my lesson study experience during 2003-2004. Student handouts and other pertinent materials are attached in the appendix.

INTRODUCTION

During 2003-2004 I participated in lesson study with Melanie Cary, Rob Dixon, and Carmen Wilson. In fall semester we designed, taught, observed, evaluated and revised a research lesson on Bystander Intervention in my introductory psychology class. Spring semester we repeated the cycle and revised lesson a second time. We met about 11 times for a total of 25-30 hours during the year. Our final Research Lesson Report documents the lesson study in greater depth. A copy is in the appendix and online at <http://www.uwlax.edu/sotl/lsp/gallery.htm>.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Introductory Psychology addresses major topics and themes in psychology. It is a required first course in the undergraduate major and also meets a general education requirement. Both semesters the class enrolled 30 first year students. About half the students had a high school psychology class but they were not familiar with the topic of Bystander Intervention. I taught the research lesson both times, November, 2003 and April, 2004. Melanie, Carmen and Rob observed the lesson on both occasions.

The research lesson topic, “Bystander Intervention: Why Onlookers Come to the Aid of Strangers in Need of Help” is the first lesson in a section on social psychology. We chose bystander intervention because the research on bystander behavior tends to conflict with popular beliefs about why strangers help or do not help. It seemed an interesting way to get students thinking about how and why the presence of other people in a situation influences individual behavior.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

As a result of the lesson students should

1. be able to explain the “bystander effect,” i.e., that the presence of onlookers decreases the chances that an individual bystander will assist a stranger in need of help.
2. be able to explain how the presence of other people influences bystander behavior
3. be better able to analyze and explain human behavior in terms of relationships among multiple factors (or variables).

Goals 1 and 2 are specific to the lesson. The third, “thinking in terms of multiple variables,” is a goal of the course and more broadly a goal for the undergraduate psychology major. Psychological reasoning involves thinking in terms of the relationships among variables. To explain any form of behavior we need to determine the factors, conditions, variables, and antecedents that influence the actions in question. Most people engage in this kind of thinking on a daily basis, and gradually develop "intuitive theories" to explain what makes people tick. In the general psychology course we introduce students to many psychological models on a wide range of topics. They are good at remembering the models, but have trouble using them to explain and predict human behavior. Moreover, their own "intuitive theories" of behavior tend to interfere with learning and using discipline-based models. Consequently an important goal of the course is to help students move beyond common sense explanations and develop an understanding of empirically-tested models of human behavior.

LESSON DESIGN

Before the class. One week before the lesson, students took a [Bystander Intervention Pre-test](#) consisting of seven (7) scenarios depicting people in need of assistance. They [predicted](#) whether bystanders would help or not help in the situations, and what factors would influence bystanders' behavior.

During the class. The class period was 85 minutes

- I described the lesson and gave written [directions](#) to students (5 minutes).
- Group work (40 minutes)
 - In small groups students created a [list of factors](#) that influence bystander intervention
 - I circulated among groups to answer questions.
 - Students prepared a [written summary](#) and an overhead transparency with their group's list of factors.
- I led a class discussion, asking students to explain their factors and compare them to those of other groups. I then introduced the research-based [model of bystander intervention](#) (20 minutes)
- Students analyzed their factors against the research-based bystander intervention model (10 minutes).
- Students wrote an [individual analysis](#) of how their group's factors fit or did not fit the bystander model (5 minutes).

After the class. Students completed a [Bystander Intervention Post-test](#) in which they predicted bystander behavior in four scenarios. At the next class period I led a class discussion comparing students' [post-test answers](#) to the [actual research results](#).

RATIONALE FOR LESSON DESIGN

Rather than tell students about bystander intervention (lecture), we decided to involve them in analyzing and explaining bystander behavior in terms of relationships among variables. I believe students are more likely to understand the multi-factorial nature of behavior if they generate and test their own models of behavior against research-based models. Moreover, we are aware that students hold a common misconception about helping behavior (i.e., “good people help, bad people don’t”). I think they are more likely to revise their beliefs if they confront the incongruities directly.

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As the lesson progressed there were three opportunities to revise and extend their understanding of this form of social behavior: 1) individually producing factors that influence bystanders to help or not to help (pre-test), 2) comparing their explanations of bystander intervention to the research-based model of bystander intervention (group work in class) and 3) predicting and explaining how bystanders would act in several novel situations (post-test).

ANALYSIS OF THE LESSON

Types of evidence of student learning.

1. *Observations of students.* Three members of the lesson study team attended the class. Each instructor observed a single small group and recorded field notes throughout the lesson.
2. *Written analyses.* Students wrote individual analyses at the end of the class period. These were used to evaluate their grasp of the research model.
3. *Pre and Post Tests.* Bystander Intervention Pre and Post-Test were used to evaluate students' understanding of the factors that influence bystander intervention.

Students' understanding changed in three areas:

1. *Understanding diffusion of responsibility.* Prior to the lesson students tended to think a bystander is more likely to help when other bystanders are present in a situation (i.e., "strength in numbers"). On the post-test a large majority of students indicated that help is less likely when other bystanders are present, based on the idea of "diffusion of responsibility."
2. *Understanding how social context affects individual behavior.* On the pre-test 87% of students based their predictions, at least in part, on the bystander's character (e.g., empathic and caring bystanders are more likely to help than those who lack empathy and do not care what happens to other people). On the post-test, however, only 17% of students referred to the bystander's personality or disposition. However, observations during the lesson indicated that some students remained ambivalent about the importance of the bystander's "character." For example, one student said something to the effect that, "I still believe that if you are a certain kind of person you will help out regardless of how many people are around."
3. *Relationships among variables.* On the post-test students were better able to state causal connections between factors in the situation (e.g., number of bystanders) and subsequent behavior (i.e., whether a person would help or not). The lesson helped develop students' ability to analyze and explain human behavior in terms of relationships among multiple variables.

REFLECTION

The research lesson was relatively successful and stands on its own as evidence of teaching improvement. In addition, we have field tested the lesson twice and can make evidence-based claims about its strengths as well as shortcomings.

The purpose of lesson study is not to create exemplary lessons but to develop a way to analyze and improve teaching and learning. Because lesson study involves scholarly inquiry into student learning, it can be a way not only to improve the teaching of those who participate in it but also a way to advance the practice of teaching more generally. I view it as a way to improve my teaching practices and contribute to pedagogical knowledge in my field.

What I am learning, thinking and doing as a result of lesson study.

The importance of learning goals. I am a proponent of backward design—the idea that you articulate what you want students to accomplish first and then design instruction to address those goals. This sounds good in theory but it is hard to do in practice. In the lesson study process we stayed true to our learning goals, which provided a clear focus and purpose for the design of the lesson. It is especially challenging to think

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about how a single lesson contributes to larger, long term goals. Looking at how a lesson supports student development in a broader sense altered my view of a lesson itself. Rather than an independent learning episode, a lesson should be part of a larger whole, linked in a purposeful way to other lessons that support cumulative learning and long term development of important values, dispositions and abilities.

Purposeful instructional design. I always prepare for class but not in ways that would best support student learning. In the design of our research lesson it has been valuable to make explicit the rationale for lesson design, to think about how certain strategies, exercises, and experiences facilitate and support changes in student thinking. For example, our group developed bystander scenarios depicting situations in which a person needed assistance. These enabled us to evaluate student beliefs and understanding of bystander intervention in a systematic way. These were also important teaching tools that engaged students in thinking about multiple causes of behavior—just the kind of thinking the lesson was intended to develop.

It is impossible to plan and design each lesson like a research lesson. However, as I continue to do lesson study I expect to better ways support specific learning goals.

Making student thinking visible. I view learning as inherently problematic and lesson study is a way to develop a better understanding of how and why students learn or do not learn they are taught. In order to study a lesson you need to make students' thinking visible and open to observation and analysis. I believe this is one of the most important pedagogical features of lesson study because it enables teachers to watch as students attempt to make sense of the subject matter and to observe the changes in their thinking that take place during the lesson. This is like opening a window into the minds of students at just the right time—when they are responding to the lesson. Our research lesson was moderately successful in this regard but I think we still missed important features of the learning process. I am very interested in developing better ways to make student thinking visible which are, at the same time, significant learning opportunities. For example, in Japanese lessons students are repeatedly asked to explain their reasoning and thinking during a lesson. This reveals how they construe the subject. At the same time, the act of explanation is in itself an important way to make sense of material and develop ones' understanding of it. Tapping into students' thinking during the lesson provides the "data" instructors need to decide how to make the lesson more effective.

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