

## Research Brief

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# Summary of: Research Study on *Examining the Connections Between Collective Teacher Efficacy and Lesson Study, Year 2*

This summary provides an overview of the initial analysis from the research study “Examining the Connections Between Collective Teacher Efficacy and Lesson Study.” The report addresses the research question: What do teachers and leaders identify as the essential components of lesson study (LS)? This qualitative case study was conducted during the 2024-2025 school year in three elementary schools in San Francisco Unified School District and involved observing public research lesson days, conducting two semi-structured interviews with LS planning team members, and video-recording a math lesson from each participating teacher. The first interview focused on participants’ experiences with lesson study, their views on collective efficacy, and the conditions they perceived as supportive. The final interview delved into their assessments of their teaching practices using video-stimulated recall, as well as their thoughts on the impact of lesson study on their teaching. Analysis was guided by a codebook developed around the core components of lesson study, leading to the identification of several key components and practices discussed below.

### **Findings:**

An analysis of the interviews allowed us to identify several core components of lesson study: collaborative structures and trust, empowerment and autonomy, instructional practices and continuous learning, and distributed leadership and shared vision. We also identified three central practices of LS during which these core components were evident: artifact share, peer observation, and selecting focal students.

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## **Core Components:**

### ***Collaborative Structures and Trust***

This theme encompasses the importance of the structured collaboration, shared goals, and the elements of trust/vulnerability many participants discussed in their interviews. Some of the collaborative structures discussed were: scheduled team planning meetings, dedicated and protected planning time, and the collaborative practices that enable teachers to form strong relationships with their colleagues where they can take risks and learn with one another. One teacher noted, “I think the amount of collaboration that we have has been phenomenal...we have a lot more agency. We also are coming at it from more of a research perspective when we’re thinking about data.” This quote underscores how collaborative structures foster a sense of agency among teachers, which is essential for building trust and encouraging vulnerability in their professional relationships.

### ***Empowerment and Autonomy***

Participants described feeling a sense of empowerment in their roles and having the autonomy to make decisions that impact their students. They emphasized the importance of supportive leaders who encourage teacher agency, prioritize personal growth, and create a school culture that values educators’ input during professional learning. As one leader reflected, “What we noticed in reflecting about how last year went was every team got to make their choice... teachers loved it; they were super engaged; they feel like it’s a valuable professional learning model.” This capacity for choice allowed teachers not only to engage with content that resonated with them, but also connected their curiosities to the school-wide theme. The leader continued, “We didn’t want teams to experience like they had a lack of authority or autonomy...we really talked about it with lesson study leads.” This highlights the necessity of fostering an environment where autonomy is valued, enabling teachers to focus on relevant professional growth while remaining aligned with the broader school goals.

### ***Instructional Practices and Continuous Learning***

Participants described that the focus of lesson study should be on students and that student-centered learning is not only key to lesson study, but also foundational to effective instructional practices and fostering continuous learning. They shared about the importance of observing research lessons and reflecting on the instructional strategies. They also frequently mentioned data-informed decision-making, both when planning a research lesson and in the day-to-day of classroom instruction. In addition, there was an emphasis on a shared commitment to improve teaching and learning through collaborative learning, and on teachers learning from both the successes and challenges during lesson study. As one teacher stated, “it’s really interesting watching the [team] talk because they’re like, ‘yeah, seven out of my twelve kids got it’...they’re taking in that data and really thinking about how to move forward with it.” This emphasizes how a focus on student understanding directly informs instructional decisions and

practices, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement among teachers.

### ***Distributed Leadership and Shared Vision***

When asked about which leaders in their school support lesson study, many teachers first named math coaches and lesson study leads as the leaders who support the day to day of lesson study as well as classroom math instruction. Principals were mentioned as supporting the overall school vision of lesson study, with the exception of one principal who was a member of one of the planning teams. Therefore her role in the school's implementation of lesson study straddled her role as both a principal and planning team member. Many participants described the importance of developing a shared vision for lesson study that aligns with the collective efforts of the teams. In all three schools, many participants mentioned narrowing the focus of the whole-school lesson study to help improve alignment across the multiple lesson study teams. One teacher noted, "I think definitely a math coach or someone who understands the process of lesson study and who's knowledgeable in the structure and who's able to guide... has been amazing." This highlights the critical role that distributed leadership plays in establishing a supportive environment for lesson study and fostering a shared vision among educators.

### **Central Practices:**

#### ***Artifact Share***

Teachers identified "artifact share" as a central practice during the *plan* phase of lesson study, explaining that it supports instructional practices and continued learning. During this practice teachers present artifacts such as student work, videos, and photographs to focus their planning on outcomes and instructional strategies. The practice fosters collaboration and accountability, enabling teachers to reflect on their experiences and share insights. As one participant explained, "we share some pictures or videos and it's a good time to just listen to others, reflect, and think about how we can apply what we have learned." The reflective nature of the artifact share, highlighted by comments like, "we do a lot of reflection about what really happened and what we want to work on" underscores its role in promoting professional growth.

#### ***Peer Observation***

Peer observation, a central practice during the *teach* phase, also enhances instructional practices and continuous learning. Observing lessons across grade levels offers insights into foundational concepts, such as place value. As one teacher recalled, "when we saw the fourth grade lesson... this is the same thing we're all working on, but obviously at different levels. When I went to the second grade lesson, it was the same thing all about place value and the same thing came up... We can see how the things students don't get impact them throughout their grades here and the things they do get, what they understand, how they're able to explain that is passed on." The experience of observing varied instructional approaches not only encourages teachers to adapt successful

strategies, but it also facilitates discussions about effective practices, enhancing professional growth. One teacher emphasized the value of observation, stating, “It’s really important to give your staff an opportunity because there’s so much learning that happens.” Each school was at a different stage of implementing school-wide LS. At School A, every math teacher participated in an LS planning team, observing one other team's research lesson. At School B, every teacher was part of an LS planning team, observing two other teams' research lessons. At School C, every math teacher was part of an LS planning team and observed every research lesson. Across all three schools, teachers expressed a desire to observe more research lessons, whether at their school or others in the district.

### ***Selecting Focal Students***

Selecting focal students was identified as a central practice throughout the lesson study cycle. Teachers from all three schools emphasized that they select focal students at the beginning of each school year. One teacher described the selection process: “The school/district focal students are usually multilingual learners, African American students, or students with IEPs... usually the student is someone you’re wondering about who should be doing better than they are or maybe a student you don’t have a relationship with who you want to get to know a little bit better as a whole person.”

Another teacher shared a reflective approach: “[W]e focus on the students we haven’t been able to move forward.” She explained that her team spent considerable time asking, “Who are these kids? What do they like? What’s not working for them? What’s going on with them?” This intentional focus helped her team prioritize these students in their discussions. “Every time we met, we thought about those students and kept them at the top of our agenda.” She emphasized how this focus increases teacher buy-in: “This is the one opportunity I feel like I have all year to go beyond surface level. I can ask, ‘What could their response be to this? What do they need access to for this?’ It makes you feel like you’re actually getting somewhere with students who have traditionally been underserved and who fall through the cracks because you can’t quite figure it out.”

### **Recommendations for San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD):**

Based on the interviews with teachers and leaders across these schools and observations of their research lesson days, we offer the following recommendations to support the spread and scale of lesson study in other SFUSD schools:

- Strengthen collaborative structures: Establish regular, protected planning time for teachers to engage in lesson study without the pressure of immediate classroom and school demands. Implement guidelines for effective team meetings to foster a trusting environment where all teachers feel safe to share their reflections and experiences.
- Support empowerment and autonomy: Encourage school leaders to actively support

teacher agency by providing choices in lesson study topics and allowing teachers to select specific focal students based on their own classroom experiences. Include teachers as part of the whole-school decision-making process regarding the school research theme and theory of action.

- Prioritize peer observation opportunities: Create a structured framework for teams to observe research lessons of other teams in their school and teams in different schools. Facilitate a system for teachers to observe lessons outside of the research lesson days as well.
- Prioritize the selection of focal students: Emphasize the importance of selecting focal students at the beginning of the school year. Provide guidance for teachers in identifying students who may need additional support.
- Develop a shared vision for lesson study: Collaborate with multiple stakeholders, including teachers, leaders, and district personnel, to create a clear and shared vision for lesson study that aligns with the school's overall vision. Conduct periodic reviews of this vision to ensure its alignment with ongoing practices and adjust it based on feedback from participants involved in lesson study.