

Lesson Study III

The Night A Professional Learning Community Was Born

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Consider this, please!

Four professors working closely for at least three years to teach and guide teacher candidates could hear a pin drop during the final reflection on Dr. Michelle Bridgewater's exquisitely crafted lesson. Their colleague and friend had designed a lesson for them to answer this inquiry question: *Why are ethics important in Special Education?*

The lesson was a breakthrough for our lesson study participants and our department team. Across all ages and positions, the lesson study group was no longer made up of individual participants, we came together as a community.

Dr. Bridgewater worked as the lesson guide and at the end of the lesson, participants wiped their eyes and sniffled quietly behind their N95 masks. The final reflection brought our lesson study world to a quiet and thought-provoking end on Friday night, September 10, 2021. The carefully designed lesson plan, the professor's practice sessions, and the agenda worked their magic. The well-crafted lesson plan and documents for the third lesson study are here: [*Updated_Agenda Rising Up with Active Learning III V3.docx](#)

What was it?

"The human need to find someone who understands..."

What was it that was so compelling about Dr. Bridgewater's choice for the lesson content and the processes that she used to deliver her content? In the embedded agenda and lesson plan linked above, there was evidence of emotion. We were so moved, that many of us let our tears flow when the lesson study community heard more than one person reflect on the lesson. By revisiting painful school memories of being

considered for placement in special education classes, the lesson study group was suddenly immersed in true-to-life special education stories among friends.

As one participant described what that was like for him, we broke barriers the night of September 10, 2021, and we became a community following the delivery of this powerful lesson. As we talked about the heartbreak of needing to find someone who understands us in a school world full of hurdles and barriers, the lesson study became “a place to seek new knowledge and actively use it to change the fundamental processes of schooling” (Lewis, Perry, Friedkin, & Roth, 2012, p. 375). After the personal disclosures, not one of us wanted to create and cause painful conditions for a child.

Making personal connections to a lesson is very compelling. Engaging lesson study learners emotionally in these meaningful activities provided opportunities for participants to connect. When this happens, neural connections are made and stored in the brain (Sousa, 2010) and learning occurs. As a special education expert, Dr. Bridgewater used her experience and knowledge to create these conditions for this lesson to connect everyone.

Going through days, weeks, months, and now years together, suddenly the Education Department became a community when we saw and felt the passion of our colleague and teacher, Dr. Michelle Bridgewater. We saw, heard, and felt the result of a master teacher’s plan and her delivery of that plan.

Lesson study is the structure that created this community that will grow and continue. We saw and felt the power of lesson study and the way it structures powerful teaching

and learning. We needed this particular lesson on this particular night. As Dr. Bridgewater displayed her deep love and passion for special education, she inspired us to act with great care and concern for every student as we reflected on the ethics required for serving special education students. We left as a community more committed to each other and our students as we searched our souls for our own answer to why ethics in our teaching actions and plans are so critical and how we must guide students to help them find someone who understands.

Many years ago, I posed this question to myself and a group of colleagues: “Can you teach someone to care?” The answer was a resounding no. My answer changed on this night as Dr. Bridgewater taught us to care by careful consideration of the answer to:

Why are ethics important in Special Education?

Possible answers:

I honestly think that Dr. Bridgewater cared so deeply about her audience and connecting us with her lesson that success was guaranteed.

Why?

- Dr. Bridgewater thought over time and so deeply about the lesson plan and how she would deliver each component that her presentation was seamless.
- Her chosen content and processes were a match and the lesson flow was smooth.
- The equity theme was perfect for where we were as participants after her opening hook about the puppies and the little boy. She created a space for us to leave the lesson as a community of learners ready to take our next step through

careful consideration of the latest UNCF research. (Anderson, Bridges, Harris & Biddle, 2020).

Equity: What is it about?

Equity is a compelling choice for content but it is hard to teach even though it is the cornerstone of teacher ethics. While equity is not an easy topic to teach, it is also not new content to our Talladega College teaching experience. This topic has been a focus and a subject of lesson studies in other contexts many times before (Friedkin & Lewis, 2012) and is recommended as a challenging topic. Equity is also found as a topic in work conducted by other lesson study communities (Hixson, 2021). Since equity appears to be an often-researched lesson study topic, perhaps, there is truth in *choosing a lesson topic or subject that is hard to teach and hard to learn as a way to engage participants in a lesson study* (Schreiner, 2017). The lesson, the practice sessions, and the delivery of the lesson were all necessary to engage a tired lesson study group on a Friday night in September and Dr. Bridgewater knew it!

In a recently published dissertation, Nazelli (2021) reports that equity in voice and a clearer focus on student ideas are critical during Lesson Study. The lesson taught on this night `had all of this. Nazelli (2021) reports on the necessity and the ideal of increasing equity in students' voices during research lessons like the one that was happening under Dr. Bridgewater's direction on Friday, September 10, 2021 and we saw what expert teaching can do with the topic of equity.

Something tells me that this rich research background was not on Dr. Bridgewater's mind when she chose her lesson content, practiced it, and taught it with great focus. I have in mind that she was remembering all of the boys and all of the girls that she had

taught who needed someone to understand them. Maybe she saw this lesson on equity and fairness as one of those seminal topics imparted as the critical truth for all of her Talladega College teacher candidates. She certainly taught it that way!

No matter the reason for her choices, having the content of equity and the lesson processes that required equitable student participation was a genius idea. Dr.

Bridgewater's small group work and LessonUp were carefully thought out and practiced by her on multiple days prior to that Friday night in September.

Each afternoon, Dr. Bridgewater announced that she was leaving for Savery Library to get a feel for the lesson's context. I can imagine Dr. Bridgewater as she walked to Savery Library to "feel" the place and to practice the delivery of the lesson. She was by herself and lost in her thoughts. Somewhere in these walks and practice sessions, the lesson content and the lesson process came to her, and then there emerged an opportunity for deep learning and engagement for her and her audience. If the teacher of the lesson is passionate about the content and is prepared to deliver the content, everything else takes care of itself (Serin, 2017). On Friday, September 10, Dr.

Bridgewater was ready and she ushered in the birth of the Talladega College Professional Learning Community with a lesson that brought all of us together. My final question: Did she know the power in her lesson and the delivery of it? See the lesson here <https://youtu.be/n1DYP0F3FmA> and decide for yourself.

Postscript on Community

The primary problem of scale is understanding the conditions under which people working in schools seek new knowledge and actively use it to change the fundamental processes of schooling. In a lesson study community, it is not unusual for teachers to take initiative to build, test, refine, and spread

instructional improvements through their collegial networks. **The satisfaction of seeing students learn and the identity and support gained as part of a professional community devoted to improvement** are, we think, two powerful and sustainable sources of motivation that are often neglected by current policy and research. (Lewis, Perry, Friedkin, & Roth, 2012, p. 375)

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