



DEREK POPE

A high school math teacher brings an intensive collaboration model from Japan to New York.

While he teaches high school math on Long Island, Derek Pope brings lessons learned from Japan into his classroom every day.

Pope, who took a two-week trip to focus on how Japanese teachers engage in lesson study—an intensive structure for teaching collaboration that includes planning, observation, and critiques, admits he was initially skeptical that the demanding time requirements of the model made sense for him and his colleagues. But the trip, sponsored by the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation (KSTF) and his school district, opened his eyes.

“I saw the power of it,” he says of the 2007 trip. “It’s much more than lesson planning, it’s a really deep opportunity to get teachers together to collaboratively plan and think through possible student misconceptions. It’s wonderful to see a culture where teachers are viewed as professionals and have the time to do this.”

Pope returned from Japan inspired to bring the lesson study model to life at his high school, initially working with fellow calculus teachers to build a culture of critical feedback and develop model lessons. “It started with a small group, and back then other teachers would look at us and say, ‘You spent 12 hours on one lesson?’ Then they would see it was really professional development while we’re creating a lesson. More and more people bought into it.”

Christina Pawlowski, another math teacher at Commack High School in New York, credits Pope for facilitating the lesson study model over the past seven years, including leading after-school professional learning circles based on the model. “Derek is the reason we have lesson study at Commack,” she says.

Derek Pope

Math Teacher, Commack High School,
New York

- Leads lesson study professional learning circles
- National Board Certified Teacher
- New York State Master Teacher
- Coca-Cola 2009 Joseph B. Whitehead Educator of Distinction Award
- 2015 KSTF Selection Advisor
- Adjunct Professor, Stony Brook University
- Cooperating Teacher

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TEACHER PROFILE

"He has opened our eyes and taught us such a great process in order to really think about how to develop a strong lesson," Pawlowski adds. "We begin by thinking about our goals for our students, what they will take from the lesson, and how that will help them in the future.... and come back as a group to discuss what worked and what did not work."

Pope became interested in teaching high school after realizing how much he enjoyed tutoring fellow math students. He credits KSTF for helping develop his leadership skills. "What I love is having well-facilitated discussions among teachers who care about their subjects—when you have that, wonderful ideas emerge," he says. "KSTF has helped me so much in my own facilitation."

Along with leading lesson study professional learning circles at his school, Pope is also part of the New York State Master Teacher Program, a regional collaborative of math and science teachers who support their peers.

He is passionate about working with pre-service teachers and teacher training. During the 2014–2015 academic year, he supported a mathematics student teacher for seven weeks. In addition to his full-time high school teaching position, Pope will begin co-teaching a methods course for pre-service mathematics teachers at Stony Brook University in the fall of 2015.

Pope calls KSTF "one of the greatest, if not the greatest, things that has happened to me as a teacher."

"It's great to be part of a community that wants educational improvement to be teacher driven; one that encourages teachers to lead from the classroom," he says. "KSTF is one of the reasons I'm still in the classroom."

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