

Lesson Study

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Introduction

Lesson Study originated in Japan. It is a collaborative professional development process that allows for an in depth exploration of an individual lesson in ways that enable participants to enhance their own and their students' learning. It is now firmly embedded in Japanese schools and has been adopted by several other countries over the last two decades. In Japan it remains an integral part of pre-service and in-service professional development and is said by some to have contributed significantly to the steady improvement of Japanese students' performance in maths and science. In the UK, Lesson Study was an integral part of the Leading Teachers' Programme, funded by England's Department for Education in 2007 in which it was credited with some significant improvements in student performance (with the caveat that it must be carefully managed and monitored to ensure that activity stays true to the essential principles of the process). These principles can be summarised in three short sentences:

- Teachers learn best from other teachers.
- Teachers have a moral obligation to share their knowledge and expertise.
- Cultivating students' interest and observing how they learn is the focus of all activity.

Like the Model for Improvement, Lesson Study depends on re-testing and refining an activity according to what is learned at each stage. Lesson Study is an example of 'Improvement as artistry' – a process devised, designed and managed by practitioners who are experts in their local contexts. It offers them a chance to make a real difference to their own classroom practice and that of their colleagues and neighbours. It is classroom oriented, small scale and internally owned and success comes in the form of improved understanding and outcomes that are often difficult to measure but can also offer evidence of improvement.

The key to success is to follow the six key stages outlined below. Crucially it is important to remember that the lesson – not the teacher – is the focus of the study and the observation.

Video clip of teachers participating in Lesson study:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV35Nr0DKFs>

Key Facts

Lesson Study is an integral part of a broader three-step model designed to support delivery of interventions that have a positive impact on inequity and attainment. The three steps can be summed up in three questions:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?
- What change can we then make that will result in improvement?

This is, however, not just a simple three step/full-stop process. Each trio of steps can be viewed as one of a series – a single stage in a progressive cycle of change in which these three questions are repeatedly asked and, for each revolution, reviewed in order to establish

- What works?
And
- What needs to be changed and how?

The model requires engagement in a constant process of PLAN, DO, STUDY, ACT.

As with any research initiative or programme, it should be considered and applied in the context of Six Key Questions that are crucial in the delivery of any change programme.

Six Key Questions:

- Is there an agreed AIM that is understood by everyone in the system?
- Are we using all our knowledge to find the RIGHT CHANGES and prioritise those likely to have the biggest impact in relation to our aim?
- Does everyone UNDERSTAND THE METHODS we will use to improve the system?
- Can we MEASURE and report progress on our improvement aim?
- Are PEOPLE and RESOURCES deployed and developed in the best possible way to support improvement?
- Do we have clear plans for INNOVATING, TESTING, IMPLEMENTING and SHARING LEARNING so we can translate and apply the improvement more widely?

What is it?

Lesson Study is a carefully negotiated and planned process in which participants look at:

- Key classroom interactions
- Content and linkage between topics
- Use of resources
- Curriculum development.

Video clip explaining the Lesson Study process:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f58eP_S1hLc

Why do it?

The aim is to enhance professional knowledge, NOT to design a 'perfect' lesson. An emphasis on sharing ideas and knowledge encourages professional development and the growth of a school as a 'professional learning community'. The focus on learning helps teachers to expand their understanding of what learning is and how it works.

What are the six key stages?

1. Setting goals – using a research theme that is relevant to your school and provides a broad and long term objective for the lesson study cycle.
2. Planning the lesson – building on what you already know about the circumstances of your school or class.
3. Teaching and observing – one teacher from the lesson study team teaches the lesson and colleagues observe. The observers focus on student responses and look for evidence of what students think.
4. Debriefing – sharing evidence of student learning.
5. Revising – on the basis of the evidence collected by observers – and re-teaching by a different member of the team to a different group of students.
6. Reflection and sharing – taking active steps to share what has been learned – for example by producing a brief report – and making sure that the knowledge generated is used wherever it can aid learning.

Example – a five point strategy

While the ideas underpinning Lesson Study are straightforward, success is not always guaranteed. This example is adapted from work done by Pete Dudley, a leading advocate of Lesson Study in UK schools, and reported online in TES connect on 1 February 2015. Pete has outlined a simple strategy that tackles some of the problems and challenges involved and which reflects the key tenets of Scotland's Model for Improvement.

1. Choose teachers whose enthusiastic participation in a pilot run is likely to inspire colleagues. Work with them to develop an idea for improving an aspect of either the curriculum or the learning of a small group of under-achieving students. Select the students and give the teachers time to research and plan their approaches.
2. Plan one to three cycles, with two to three lessons in each cycle and timetable the whole process into your annual calendar in advance. This helps to minimise costs and reserve time for research and essential discussion. Plan 'open house' lessons (where other teachers have the chance to look at and comment on progress) – this is a good way to communicate knowledge to the whole school, enthuse the learning community and cement new practices.
3. Involve leadership. Where headteachers are active participants, schools are in the best position to maximise the benefits lesson study has to offer.
4. Use expert knowledge. Don't think you have to do all the work and find all the answers yourself. Make the most of specialist knowledge to inform your lesson studies. The internet is a good source of ideas but whole-school issues may demand input from external experts and this needs to be built into your plans for the work.
5. Communicate success stories to staff, students, governors, parents and the wider world, using the evidence gathered by your Lesson Study participants. Collaborate with other schools and build Lesson Study into your school's professional development activities at all levels and into the school's publicity materials. BUT make sure it does not become part of performance management – people must feel safe to take risks and expose their vulnerabilities.

Everyone should be committed to sharing what they have learned on a regular basis and at least once a year so that Lesson Study becomes a natural part of your school's cycle of development, reflection, improvement and renewal.

Further Reading

Lesson Study: A Handbook by Dudley, P. 2014. Available at: www.lessonstudy.co.uk

Lesson study: A Japanese Approach to Improving Mathematics Teaching and Learning by Fernandez, C. and Yoshida, M. 2004.

Lesson Study for Learning Community: A Guide to Sustainable School Reform by Saito, E., Murase, M., Tsukui, A., Yeo, J. 2015.

Leading Lesson Study: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Facilitators by Stepanek et al., 2007.

Lesson study links

www.lessonstudy.co.uk

<http://www.walsnet.org>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV35Nr0DKFs>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f58eP_S1hLc

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