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Principal Support in Lesson Study

Tang Keow Ngang^{a*}, Lim Chap Sam^a^a*School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang and 11800, Malaysia*

Abstract

Lesson Study is a model of professional development that has its origins in Japan. The aim of this study is to explore to what extent school administrators that is headmaster or headmistress of elementary schools support the implementation of Lesson Study. Because of teachers who are involved in Lesson Study need to collaboratively plan, deliver, observe and discuss lessons that have a particular pedagogic focus often related to difficult aspects of the subjects or focused on the learning of particular groups of pupils, therefore headmasters' support is very important to ensure a successful Lesson Study process. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with the nine elementary school administrators from three types of schools in Malaysia, namely national, national Chinese type and national Tamil type schools who have more than 5 years of administrative work experiences. Findings indicate that changes that occur in those schools before and after Lesson Study cycles are done as such teachers use alternative methods and good strategies to teach, support students' ideas, help and correct each other mistakes, loyal to school, have high expectation for excellence, improve professional growth. In addition, school administrators also provide support by release time either during the school day or after school for teachers to finalize the lesson plan, prepare materials and revise the lesson. Besides, school administrators also release time on staff development to conduct, observe and discuss the lesson as a whole team in order to allow revision of the lesson.

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1. Introduction

Lesson Study is a professional development process that Japanese teachers engage in to scientifically inspect their practice, with the objective of becoming more effective. Operating on Lesson Study involves planning, teaching, observing, and critiquing the lessons. While working on a study lesson, teachers cooperatively prepare a detailed plan for the lesson, which one of the teachers uses to teach the lesson in a real classroom and other group members

* Tang Keow Ngang. Tel.: +6-017-5396315; fax: +6-04-6572907.

E-mail address: tang@usm.my

(for example: teachers in the same area) observe the lesson. Then the group comes together to discuss their observations of the lesson. Generally the group revises the lesson, and another teacher implements it in a second classroom while group members look on the lesson again. The group will gather together again to discuss the observed lesson. Finally, the teachers produce a reflective report of what their study lessons have taught them, particularly with respect to their solution of problems in their teaching (Dudley, 2008).

In short, Lesson Study is a system of classroom inquiry in which several teachers collaboratively plan, teach, observe, revise and share the results of a single class lesson. In a Lesson Study, teachers wisely explore how pupil learning, thinking and behavior change as a result of the lesson. The practice of Lesson Study can lead to instructional improvement as teachers become more well-informed about how their pupils learn and think and how instruction affects pupil thinking. The uniqueness of Lesson Study is it involves backward design which starts with the clarification of the aim or endpoint of the learning process and then the design of instructional experiences that lead to the aim. During the lesson design phase, teachers exchange ideas about how pupils are probably to react to each section of the lesson.

Headmaster or principal in school provides his or her support in Lesson Study in order to play a key role in the delivery of quality instruction. School administrators' responsibilities include ensuring educational strategies are in position that support effective learning for all pupils. Therefore school administrators serve as a facilitator, guide and supporter of quality instructional practices. The responsibility for outlining effective practices for pupil instruction is an administrator's task that should be shared with teachers and may include support from the curriculum department and consultants. In conclusion, Lesson Study should be utilized wisely, as part of a whole-school approach to improving classroom practice led by senior teachers and supported by a school leader. Lesson Study has the potential to drive focused improvements in teaching and learning and consequent improvements in pupil outcomes (Stetson & Associates Inc., 2011).

2. How does Lesson Study work?

Teachers in the Lesson Study group work together over a period of time and in the following phases (Bush, 2009).

2.1. Group agreement as to the intend focus of the Lesson Study

The study lesson provides a valuable opportunity for a department in the school to identify a challenging aspect of teaching and learning that would gain from a detailed investigation by a supportive, collaborative group with the help of the leading teacher and the support from principal.

2.2. Plan together

The group considers the learning needs of the class to be taught and collaboratively designs an innovative lesson or sequence of lessons that uses the techniques to be focused upon. The planning is comprehensive and identifies resources, teaching approaches, projected student activity, predicted pupil responses and outcomes.

2.3. Teach the lesson and observe the learning

One teacher agrees to teach the lesson and the rest of the group observes closely the way pupils react, how excellently they learn and make improvement and how well the design of the lesson meets pupils' needs and engages them in learning.

2.4. Review the lesson and its impact on the pupils

Following the lesson, the group meets to review its success and share their observations about its effect on pupils' learning. They consider what functioned and what needs to be adjusted, and what has been learned about the pedagogical approaches being concentrated on.

2.5. Revise and adjust the lesson

As a result of the review, teachers in the group agree how to refine and adjust the lesson or lesson sequence and what they hope to achieve by doing so. They re-plan with a different class or group in mind. The Lesson Study is then repeated with a different member of the group teaching and with a different class or group of pupils. This second lesson is again reviewed for its success and what has been detected about its effect on pupils' learning.

2.6. Extrapolate and share findings

Finally, the Lesson Study group considers what has been learned and assumed from the process and come to an understandings ways to share these results more widely within and beyond the department.

3. Principal support in Lesson Study

Bush (2009) suggested on how principals provide support to get Lesson Study going in schools.

3.1. Choose a group of teachers

School administrator like principal or headmaster has to choose a group of three (at least) including the leading teacher works well. Principal must choose those teachers who are likely to enjoy the challenge of starting up a new professional learning approach in the school. Then administrator consider including at least one member of the school and/or department's leadership team and aim for a mix of teaching experience.

3.2. Hold an initial meeting

The group should set out expectations and ground rules which enable teachers to feel free to take risks and not feel they are under scrutiny. In a Lesson Study all members of the group are of equal status as professional learners with the leading teacher acting as a practitioner or adviser. In the meeting, they should aim to set some parameters which are based on identified departmental priorities for improvement. Next, they will agree common formats for planning, observation or analysis.

3.3. Prompts for Senior Leadership Team: resourcing the process

Principal or headmaster will have to draw on the resource of the leading teacher as the facilitator to promote collaboration in the department. Then, principal or headmaster give the group members dedicated time (an hour at least) to plan the first study lesson. After that, principal or headmaster has to protect their time on the day of the study lesson and make sure they can have a post-lesson discussion within a day or so of carrying out the study lesson. This is followed by taking an active interest in how the process is going. Besides principal or headmaster has to make sure group members have dedicated opportunities to share what they have developed with other colleagues such as a staff meeting or a coaching opportunity. Finally principal or headmaster uses these members of the group as Lesson Study champions in the school to organize and develop the next Lesson Study groups.

4. Aims of this paper

In view of the strong relationship between good principal support and effective teaching through Lesson Study, it will be beneficial to examine how these principals or headmasters create support to their teachers in Lesson Study process. Supports that are identified might help other school administrator especially new principals or headmasters to enhance their support relationship with teachers and consequently resulted in better teaching and learning. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to highlight the skills used by these principals or headmasters in building good support with their teachers in lesson study project.

5. Methodology

This study employed in-depth interview with elementary school administrators. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with six of elementary school administrators to explore their perspectives on their support in Lesson Study. For example, we might ask administrators who associated with Lesson Study about their experiences and expectations related to the Lesson Study, the thoughts they have concerning Lesson Study operations, processes, and outcomes, and about any changes they perceive in their teachers as a result of their involvement in the Lesson Study. A total of nine elementary school principals from three types of schools in Malaysia, namely national, national Chinese type and national Tamil type schools who have more than five years of administrative work experiences are the participants in this study.

6. Findings and Discussion

For this paper, we focused our analysis mainly on qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews with school principals showing how these principals provide support in Lesson Study and its impact on quality teaching. Analysis of the nine principals gave us great insight into how the behavior changes of their teachers before and after the Lesson Study process.

6.1. Build teachers' loyalty to their career

Lesson study provides an ongoing method to improve instruction based on careful observation of pupils and their work. In the lesson study cycle teachers have to work together to formulate goals for pupil learning and long-term development. Hence, Lesson Study process is able to build teachers' loyalty to their career according to their principals.

"By having Lesson Study, I found my teachers start to like teaching profession. Although the process is difficult but I found my teachers engage in teaching" (R1)

"I notice my teachers more loyal to their position because most of them do not like administrative work but like teaching" (R3)

"At initial stage, I found my teachers do not like Lesson Study because they do not realize its importance, feel that Lesson Study is a burden to them. But later I found them ok with it" (R9)

6.2. Alternative methods

The Lesson Study cycle provides the opportunities for teachers to build powerful instructional strategies. For example, group members develop questioning strategies that stimulate pupil interest and learning. Therefore alternatives methods have been created through Lesson Study.

"To show my support to my teachers, I also being part of the team and I teach using alternative methods that the Lesson Study group suggested to me." (R6)

"All the expenses used to teach my students well using alternative methods, I will pay." (R4)

6.3. Correct mistake

One of the steps in Lesson Study is reflect and re-teach, or plan the next step. Hence teachers will be able to refine and re-teach the lesson in another classroom after correcting the mistake done before. On top of that, teachers would like to address new issues or problems in their next lesson cycle.

"When I check my students' worksheets and found some mistakes made by my teachers, I would like to enter the classroom to observe my teachers and correct his or her mistake or assisted by Lesson Study group to solve the problems." (R2)

"Observation by Lesson Study is very useful to correct the teachers' mistake. I don't take anything you know...along with me...don't make the teachers frighten anything you know...Just normal. My aim is to give feedback to correct their mistake." (R8)

“...let them teach, group members observe...if they make any mistake, just discuss nicely and improve...Not to find fault on teachers but help them to correct their mistakes” (R5)

6.4. Disseminate information

Some school administrators have created dedicated professional learning time when Lesson Study groups can plan and analyze their lessons. This is the time normally allocated to professional development and management for the purpose of disseminating information.

“Through Lesson Study discussion is the best way to disseminate information.” (R7)

“After the end of Lesson Study, I would like my teachers to follow up the dissemination to other staff, for example by offering further in-class demonstration, coaching and feedback on planning.” (R1)

6.5. Excellent teacher’s characteristics

Lesson Study consists of a detailed study or examination of the practice of teaching. The process is built on the premise that the best way to improve education is to get teachers together to study the processes of teaching and learning in classrooms, and then devise ways to improve them. Hence it is fulfilling the excellent teacher’s characteristics.

“Most of the teachers who are involved in Lesson Study ...very hardworking...whatever things I give it to him, he can produce...can produce results...last year the pupils all pass you know, there is only one pupil you know cannot pass...he tried his best...so.. really excellent.” (R3)

“He knows his field very well...he knew la what his doing...after joining Lesson Study.” (R5)

“You know...those teachers’ approach to pupils, their techniques...strategies are all good lah...so that why they can make it...I support Lesson Study.”

6.6. Sharing good teaching practices with other schools

Ahead of the study lessons, the group members in Lesson Study should identify with department and school administrators what opportunities there should be for teachers in the group to share with colleagues in the school as well as other schools what they have done, learned and refined, especially in the key teaching technique being developed.

“I encourage my teachers to share their key teaching techniques and strategies with their colleagues in my schools. I also let them share with their friends in other schools. You know...lah, sometimes they also share with us all the good teaching practices. We cannot selfish.” (R7)

6.7. Show support to teacher’s teaching

School administrators can develop professional learning through Lesson Study in departments they support by establishing and working with a Lesson Study group, and using the Lesson Study model as a platform for in-school coaching. School administrators can build Lesson Study into their school teaching and learning policy by creating a staff professional learning policy. This provides teachers and other entitlement to professional learning and continuing professional development opportunities which include the models now recognized as having most impact on classroom practice.

“The first step I will do is providing support to my teachers, such as moral support, money support, time support, and all the support.” (R9)

“I give my full cooperation to my teachers. So, whatever they bring forward with their programs and along that, as long as can improve teaching practices, can help my students, I could help by financially, I help them by coaching them, support them.” (R4)

“Ok, let’s say teachers suggest any teaching aids to buy....so how, the school will help them or how to give them support. Sometimes, to show my support I use the grant money, the Government grant money ..PCG...we have some allocation to assist them...yes...we have to support them” (R3).

7. Conclusion

This paper draws on research carried out in three types of elementary schools and builds on the experiences of a two year encompassed at least three cycles of Lesson Study. From the school administrators’ points of view indicated that Lesson Study has successfully make drastic change among the teachers. Lesson Study works because it is a very clear deliberative process. It builds upon joint assessment of ‘case pupil’. It sets out clearly how to use these assessments to assist in joint planning of high impact pedagogical approaches. These are planned, taught, observed and jointly evaluated by the Lesson Study group focusing on the learning of the pupils they are responsible for teaching. The result is a shared view of how to personalize that teaching for real learners, and widening repertoire of practices for the teachers involved. In conclusion, Lesson Study utilized wisely has the potential to build the bridge between ‘assessment’ and ‘for learning’.

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