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Lesson Study in Kazakhstani Schools

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Lesson Study is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon in the teaching and learning practice as a means to improve and enhance pedagogy as well as students' learning. In Kazakhstan Lesson Study was introduced in 2012 due to the countrywide reform in education. The recently published book *Educational Reform and Internalization: the Case of the School Reform in Kazakhstan* (2014) makes a profound summary of the work done within some aspects of the Reform, however no academic sources are available shedding light on such phenomenon as Lesson Study in Kazakhstani schools. Important to mention, in 2016 Kazakhstan, represented by the Center of Excellence, became a member of the World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS), which could be marked as a significant achievement on the path of promoting this approach to teachers' professional development in the country. Therefore, due to the reciprocal interest of Kazakhstan and the world educational community in Lesson Study, this paper aims at making a contribution to the growing number of literature by exploring and recording teachers' perspective on if and how teachers benefit from their participation in Lesson Study.

Research question:

If and how do teachers benefit from their involvement into LS?

Design/methodology/approach: This study adopts an exploratory design and the thematic analysis where individual perspectives on how Lesson Study is practiced in schools and if and what benefits the teachers gain from their participation were recorded by means of 30-40 minutes long semi-structured interviews with 16 teachers from 9 different regions of Kazakhstan, involved into Lesson Study for no less than a year

Findings:

Lesson Study is a growing phenomenon in Kazakhstan which, if systemically supported and organized properly based on the shared understanding, has a great potential to make a positive impact on teachers' learning, knowledge sharing and collegiality as well as to become a powerful tool to help teachers overcome collaboratively the pressure of the nationwide Reforms. It has profound potential to change teachers' values and beliefs about the effective pedagogies applicable to students' learning and developing skills, required in the 21 century

Originality/value:

This paper is the first academic source to shed light on Lesson Study in the context of Kazakhstan

Keywords: Lesson study, Kazakhstan, Reform, Teachers' professional development

Back to Basics: What is Lesson Study? ---What is Our Future?--

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The aim of this paper is to examine the various meanings attached to the concept of Lesson Study outside Japan in the light of its chaotic and complicated global status in order to extrapolate possible future directions.

In the worldwide context of Lesson Study, every individual, presumably except for the Japanese, seems to have quite a different image of it. This would suggest that Lesson Study has been grasped, interpreted, recognised or understood differently, although everyone knows its origin.

As is obvious, our society is 'the World Association of Lesson Studies' (WALS) where 'studies' is in the plural form, which suggests that the association does not pursue one specific framework of Lesson Study. In other words, 'Lesson Studies' is rather placed at the top of an umbrella as a sort of comprehensive term including other similar studies. As a matter of fact, Shibata (p.23) mentions that (in the WALS context) 'Lesson Studies' includes varieties of research on lessons at schools such as action research, learning study and lesson study, although the origin of the name of the association is derived from 'Lesson Study' or 'Research Lesson' at schools in Japan.

However, the concepts of Lesson Study nowadays appear to be fairly complicated in the global context insofar as there are various interpretations of Lesson Study. Unfortunately, the WALS does not provide a clear definition or specific criteria of it on its website, which gives rise to misgivings that people may be misled into believing that there is one specific systematic methodology of Lesson Study.

In fact, Peter Dudley uses 'Lesson Study' in a singular form to provide his definition of it at the very beginning of his internationally well-known *Lesson Study: A Hand Book* (2011, p.2):

Lesson Study (LS) is a highly specified form of classroom action research focusing on the development of teacher practice knowledge. It has been in use in Japan since the 1870s. LS therefore pre-dates action research as we know it in the West, by some 70 years.

His remark clearly shows that 'Lesson Study' is equivalent to action research, which would markedly differentiate it from Shibata's observation. In addition, when considering Wolf & Akita (2008, p.28), it is realised that the situation is much more complex: They delineate 15 different features between 'Lesson Study' and action research, although they also provide 11 commonly shared aspects.

Moreover, there are at least four more features that create some awkwardness about Lesson Study as a discipline, specifically from the viewpoint of Japanese who have been involved in different styles of Lesson Study in Japan: collaboration, 'three case pupils' quantitative research and hypothesis-experiment-verification/testing approach. The first three aspects are mentioned and discussed in many papers and presentations, although their theoretical assumptions are often quite distorted from the connotation implicit in the original Japanese Lesson Study. The last point has not been referred to in the global context of Lesson

Study previously, although this is one of the vital features of Lesson Study still prevailing in the Japanese school-based ‘Sesearch Lesson’

Therefore, in this paper, all aforementioned aspects will be explored in order to describe the present interpretations of Lesson Study by reviewing the past literature on the subject, including not only academic books and papers but also types of handbooks for Lesson Study published by Local State Boards of Education in Japan. A comparison of Lesson Study in the Japanese context with that in the global context will be used to discover ways forward and to propose future directions for the pedagogical discipline.

Implications of Adapting Lesson Study in Non-Japanese contexts

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The phenomenal spread of Japanese Lesson Study (JLS) beyond Japan has been widely documented. The widespread adoption of JLS in contexts beyond Japan is indicative of the perception that the seemingly obvious routines of JLS are transferable into foreign contexts. It is however, to be expected, that various aspects of JLS would be adapted to suit the culture of the adopting context. The diverse ways in which JLS is adapted across different contexts provides the opportunity for researchers to unpack what is critical in JLS to effectively bring about teacher professional learning. Such a study may shed light on what needs to be done to better adapt, implement and sustain LS to support teacher development across non-Japanese contexts. This paper is based on the findings from a nation-wide research project undertaken to explore the adaptations made to JLS in Singapore schools. A 2014 nation-wide survey of school principals found that 54 percent of all Singapore schools implement LS. Given the phenomenal spread of LS, the research study was conducted to unpack (1) the variation of LS in Singapore schools, and (2) the local context-dependent factors that brought about the variation. Surveys and case studies provided data to examine LS structure and implementation processes in Singapore schools and to investigate school leaders' and teachers' experiences and understandings of LS processes. In teasing out the subtle differences among the Singaporean adaptations and JLS, we gleaned a deeper understanding of the cultural and contextual factors that elucidate key features of JLS that are pertinent in creating the necessary conditions for effective teacher learning. The adaptations made to LS also revealed the subliminal socio-cultural values upheld by Singaporean educators, which will help us understand ourselves better. Building on the insights from the study about how Singapore schools are adapting LS to suit local school conditions and contexts, this presentation discusses the implications of such modifications.