

World Association of Lesson Studies International Conference 2011

The University of Tokyo, Japan 26-28 November 2011



'Professional Community for Enhancing Learning'

The World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS) aims to promote and advance the research and practices focused on Lesson Studies in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson Study is practised worldwide and has proved to be a successful and effective means of facilitating teachers' professional growth and enhancing teaching and learning. The 2009 conference was held in Hong Kong and the 2010 conference in Brunei.

The third International WALS Conference was held in Tokyo in November 2011. Four hundred participants from 15 countries attended the conference, which was organised by the University of Tokyo. Whilst members of WALS from other countries have 'borrowed' Japanese Lesson Study and adapted and contextualised it in their respective educational systems, this conference provided an opportunity to experience first-hand how Lesson Study is practised in Japanese schools and to engage in dialogue with teachers and researchers from very different education systems.

Day 1

Manabu Sato (Professor of the University of Tokyo and Chairperson of the conference organising committee) welcomed all delegates to the conference.

Keynote Speech 1

Going Beyond Dialogism in Learning and Instruction : Lessons for Lesson Study

- Yrjo Engerstrom (University of Helsinki)

Engerstrom argues that the origins of human communication and dialogue are in practical, object-orientated collaborative activities. Divorcing dialogue from object-orientated activity reduces learning to verbal interaction without practical

consequences. If education is to have a transformative impact on life, he continues, then the object of learning and teaching must be kept at the centre of inquiry.

Keynote Speech 2

Crossing Borders : The Global Spread of Lesson Study

- Christine Kim-Eng Lee (Associate Professor, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

The focus of Kim-Eng Lee's presentation was on the spread of Japanese Lesson Study to many countries around the world. She posed the following questions :

- How and why has Japanese Lesson Study spread to other countries with different contexts and cultures?
- What happens as a result of this movement?
- What conditions need to be in place to ensure that Lesson Study is not a passing fad but is practised in the right spirit?

There has been a rapid rise in the number of schools in Singapore using Lesson Study as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning. In 2004, only 1 school was using Lesson Study – by 2011, 162 schools were involved. The programme has benefited from the support from the Government and from the Academy of Principals.

She went on to outline the development and the various phases of adoption, noting the organisations through which Lesson Study was introduced into different countries e.g. support from governments was instrumental to the adoption of Lesson Study in Singapore, Indonesia and Hong Kong.

She noted the adaptations which have been made: e.g the use of 'case pupils' and the formal involvement of pupils in UK research lessons; the development of a hybrid, focusing on the 'object of learning' and the use of Variation Theory in Hong Kong; the integration of curriculum design models in planning research lessons in Singapore.

The future: there is a real need to collect evidence of practice in different countries in order to develop a deep understanding of their effectiveness.

Symposium1: Teachers' Professional Development through Lesson Studies

The presenters were:

Edmund Lim (Principal of Huamin Primary School, Singapore)

Chen Xiangming (Peking University, China)

Pete Dudley (Cambridge University, UK)



Pete Dudley speaks during the Symposium

This symposium focused on two main areas of enquiry :

1. What do teachers learn from lesson study? How should teachers' learning processes be explained? What aspects take priority in Lesson Study in different countries?
2. How does Lesson Study support teachers' professional development? How does this develop beyond individual teachers to whole-school policies and beyond into school networks?

Each of the presenters described the development in their own countries and the discussant (Airi Rovio-Johansson, University of Gothenburg Sweden) invited questions and comments from the audience in what was an informative and lively discussion.

The Conference Dinner provided an opportunity to listen to a string quartet, whilst eating delicious food and meeting delegates from across the world. In addition Professor John Elliott launched the new journal :

International Journal for Lesson and Learning studies

Chief Editor: John Elliott (Emeritus Professor of Education, University of East Anglia)

Co-Editor : Lo Mung Ling (Adjunct Professor, Hong Kong Institute of Education)



The String Quartet entertains delegates at the Conference Dinner

Day 2

On Day 2, there were opportunities to attend a range of Symposiums, Round Table discussions and Workshops. In addition there was an Open Forum which considered the development of Lesson Study in a range of contexts and a Poster Session enabling delegates to discuss implementation with practitioners from many countries..

The Symposium entitled: *High Quality Learning : Approaches from Lesson Studies*, involved presenters from Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan and examined the factors contributing to qualitative differences in and impact on student learning. A further symposium examined ‘ *The role of a professional learning community in an era of managerial and testing accountability.*’

An Open Forum session ‘Lesson Studies in the Japanese context’ contained inputs from both USA and Japan, focusing on the original Japanese model and the ways in which this has been implemented and developed in Japan and beyond.

An important element of the WALS conferences is the mix of academics and practising teachers, with the workshops in particular providing opportunities to hear directly from those teachers. In total there were 31 parallel workshops available, each with 4 or 5 short sessions, thus providing an enormous range of subjects but all with a Lesson Study element and making it very difficult to select those of most interest – there were easily enough to extend into a third day

Sessions sampled included presentations by :

- teachers from St Andrew’s Primary School, Singapore, entitled : *Teaching students to use writing rubric for self-assessment;*

- A Pre-School teacher from Spain, supported by staff from the University of Malaga and by Angelika Kullberg(University of Gothenburg) entitled : *What is critical for pupils' learning of fractions and what does a critical feature entail?*
- A graduate student of Kyushu University, Japan entitled: 'What is Lesson Analysis by Children'
- A lecturer from the University of Saga, Japan entitled' Curriculum Management and Lesson Study',
- Teachers from Da Qiao primary School, Singapore entitled 'Reforming Social Studies in a Fun Way'

The 2012 WALs Conference will take place in Singapore.

Day 3

Visit to Hamanogo Elementary School, accompanied by Professors Sato and Akita.

What an experience! The day started very early with a 6.30am pick-up from the hotel (packed breakfast en-route). Then followed a 2 hour journey by coach to Chigasaki City, south of Tokyo (and with a view of Mount Fuji from the school playground).

Hamanogo Elementary School is a pilot school that has served as a starting point for the spread of learning communities across Japan. Established in 1998, the school is guided by three ideas:

- Public philosophy: the school is charged with fulfilling each child's right to learn. The school is considered as an open public space, open to the whole community
- Democracy : The purpose of the school is to build a democratic society and schools themselves must, therefore, be democratic social organisations – each schoolchild, teacher and parent participates in the management
- Excellence : Teaching and learning activities are built essentially on the pursuit of excellence 'the pursuit of the best through utmost efforts brings deep humility and modesty to teachers and learners alike'

The school's vision is that *schools as learning communities are so constructed as to allow public philosophy, democracy and excellence to be acquired and practised spontaneously. Classrooms are organised to support children's active, cooperative and reflective learning. The system in all classes above third grade require that :*

- *children organise a collaborative learning system in groups of 4 of both genders;*
- *they establish a relationship in which they learn from each other;*

- *they learn to stretch their limits.*

Teachers are required ;

- *to consistently listen, connect and respond;*
- *to speak at a lower pitch and choose words carefully;*
- *to pursue creative teaching by spontaneously responding to children.*

In addition to monthly faculty meetings and weekly meetings for each grade, in-school seminars, based on classroom observation are seen as central to the school's philosophy and development. At least once a year, teachers open their classrooms to their colleagues and present their case studies, where the focus is on the learning as experienced by the children (not on teaching materials or teaching skills).

Every month, hundreds of teachers visit the school. Similar Pilot schools across Japan attract hundreds of teachers – up to 500 may attend an annual open day

On the day we visited Hamanogo school it was their annual open day and included public lessons for 300 Japanese teachers in addition to the conference delegates (approx. 60). On arrival we were all provided with slippers as, in keeping with Japanese custom, no-one wears outdoor shoes inside the building (imagine providing slippers for almost 400 people!). We were welcomed by the School Principal and the school

we were then free to look around and visit classrooms.

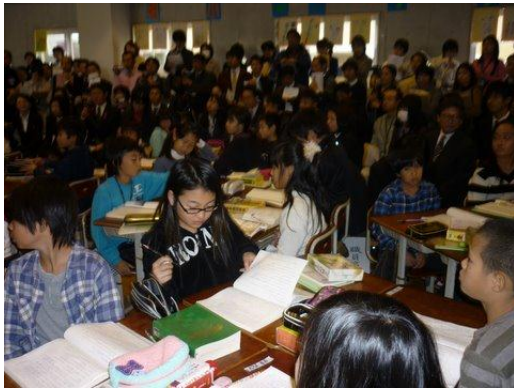


A Year 2 reading lesson

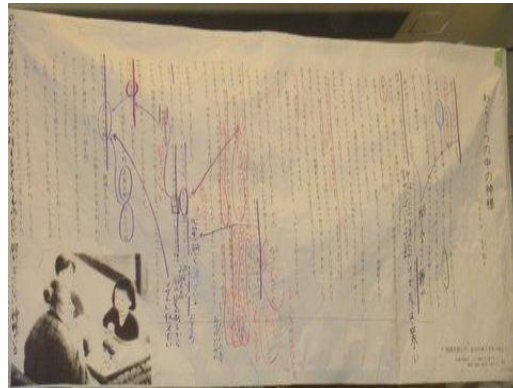


A Year 3 mathematics lesson

There then followed the public lessons – a Year 5 reading comprehension lesson and a Year 2 Art lesson. Approximately 200 teachers gathered around to observe the Year 5 lesson taught by Ms. Michiko Fujimori. There were 32 pupils who were seated in 8 mixed groups of 4. An ‘official’ observer was attached to each group.



The Public Lesson



The annotated text

The unit of work consisted of 11 lessons, of which this was the 7th. There were unit objectives and lesson objectives provided in the plan.

The lesson objective: To be able to understand the feelings and thoughts of characters based on the personality of Omitsu and the views of the carpenter as reflected in the story, ‘God and the Straw Boots’. Each pupil had their own copy of the text book of traditional Japanese tales, which they were able to annotate. On display was also an enlarged version of the text of the story, measuring about 15 feet in width by 2.5 feet in height in order to accommodate the vertical layout of Japanese script.

The children were asked to read specific sections of the text – they read to themselves but out aloud. When all had finished the teacher asked them to discuss in groups – there was evidence of children helping each other, pointing to different parts of the text for evidence to support their ideas. This was followed by a class

discussion, designed to deepen understandings. Children provided extensive feedback (reminiscent of dialogic talk), with the teacher interjecting rarely but, from time to time, helping the children to take a point further and annotating the enlarged text accordingly. Interestingly, the children appeared to be undisturbed by the 200 or so observers around them.

After lunch the 'official' observers, together with the teacher, formed a panel to discuss the lesson and to provide feedback. The teacher was very open about what she thought had been more or less effective in the lesson. The focus throughout was on the learning of individual children.

Overall, an interesting experience but it is difficult to imagine that the format of this Open Day may not translate to schools in Great Britain! However, there were many features which certainly would.