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Lesson study: a handbook

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Improving practice and progression through Lesson study: a handbook for senior leaders and practitioners working with children in the Early Years

*This booklet is a step by step guide on how to use **Lesson study** to **develop** and **refine** teaching techniques to help improve children's learning and development.*

The booklet contains information about:

- *getting lesson study going in your setting,*
- *planning, learning and analysing the 'study session'*
- *involving children in the process*
- *suggestions for distilling what the participants have learned, how practice has been improved and how to pass new practice knowledge on to others.*

Lesson Study is a professional learning process. It works because it focuses on the **learning** and **progress** made by children as their practitioners develop specific pedagogic techniques designed to improve an aspect of teaching and learning identified within their setting.

Lesson study has been used in Japan for over 140 years and is now used widely in the East Asia. It is a model for collaborative classroom professional learning which embodies all the features of effective teacher learning: high quality input which is followed by activity where:

- two or more practitioners work together, developing practice in the classroom, focusing on the needs and learning of real children and trying to solve a teaching or learning based problem which is affecting children's progress
- they are engaged in developing a teaching technique which is designed to improve a specific aspect of learning for identified children
- they keep a record of what they learn and they pass on the practice knowledge which they gain to others – for example by coaching, leading a professional development meeting or providing a demonstration session.

Lesson study has been used successfully in this country to improve teaching techniques and children's progress in core subjects in primary and secondary schools and to develop broader pedagogic approaches such as assessment for learning. It has also been used successfully in Japan and Singapore to improve learning and development in the Early Years.

During a Lesson study cycle a small group of practitioners (or even a pair) will:

- a. Use the information they have gathered from day to day and periodic assessment to agree a focus for child learning and development.
- b. Jointly identify a teaching approach to develop or improve which addresses that need (See Fig. 1 Page 5)
- c. Identify three 'case children'. Each should typify a group of learners in the class – for example high, middle or lower attaining in the strand being taught and developed.

- d. Jointly plan a 'study session' which both uses develops and closely studies the effects of this new approach –.and keeps in mind the three case children. (*Also known as Research Lessons, there can be a danger that people think study sessions are for conducting experiments rather than developing practice. They are definitely for **developing practice***).
- e. Teach and jointly observe the study session focusing on the case children's learning and progress. They may repeat and refine this over several sessions or teaching sequences. Not all these need to be observed study sessions.
- f. Interview the case children to gain their insights into the study session.
- g. Hold a post session discussion analysing how the case children responded to the technique, what progress they made and what can be learned about the application of the approach – next time.
- h. Formally share the outcomes with a wider audience of other practitioners – in a presentation, by demonstration or by coaching.

Guidance for each of these stages is a section of this booklet. The guidance is drawn from what we know about how lesson study has worked in other schools.

The final two sections provide ideas on how school leaders can

- i. Create time for lesson study and build it into the organisation
- j. Use expert practitioners to support and develop the professional learning from Lesson Study and using the lesson study model as a platform for coaching

a. Getting Lesson Study going in your setting

'It enabled me to see things in my classroom differently'

What has worked well

Notes

Choose a group of practitioners – **three works well** – who are likely to enjoy the challenge of starting up a new professional learning approach in the setting. We know lesson study works well when there is at least one member of the senior team involved and the practitioners have a mix of teaching experience.

Hold a meeting with them to set out expectations and ground rules which enable people 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.

Give them some parameters which are based on identified setting, class or group needs. (For example to develop boys' engagement in writing independently)

Use common formats for planning, observation or analysis. (Examples you can use are in this booklet)

Give dedicated time (an hour at least) to plan the first study session.

Protect their time on the day of the study session and make sure there can be a post session discussion within a day or so of carrying out the study session.

Take an active interest in how the process is going.

Make sure that the group have dedicated opportunities to share what they have developed with other colleagues –a staff meeting, a coaching opportunity.

Use these members of the group as lesson study champions in the school to convene and develop the next Lesson Study groups.

b. & c. Planning the first Study session and identifying the ‘case children’

What has worked

Notes

Agree which class/setting you will conduct the first study session in and then identify three children who reflect different groups of learners in the class – children who are making good, average or below average progress in the session focus strand.

Agree the learning and development stage of each child in the focus strand through looking at evidence from on-going assessment.

Write out in full exactly what you want each child to have learned in relation to the focus strand and what they will do in the study session to show they are on track for this. (You can use the planner on page 7).

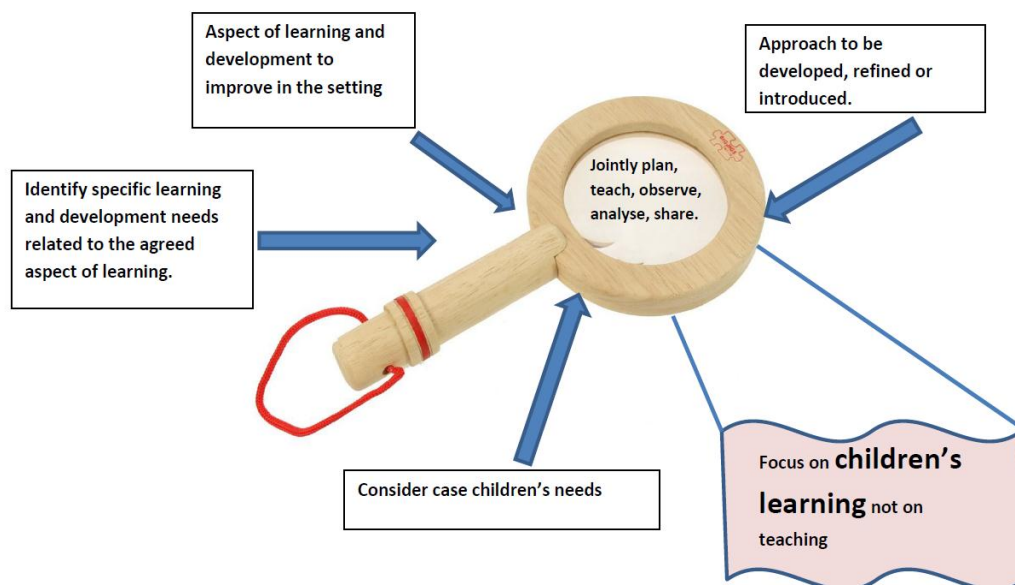
Make sure you have ‘Development Matters’ to hand.

Plan the session and the learning environment with particular attention to the areas of focus for the observation. Note down what you hope the response of each case child will be. What will each child do at this point to evidence their learning?

Identify as carefully as you can: what resources will be used and how, what questions will be asked and how additional adults will be deployed.

Agree who will focus their observations on which case child. It helps to have some rules to ensure you don’t all gather data about two children and miss the third.

A lesson study planner is provided on page 6. It should be enlarged to A3 for use. Each lesson study group member should have a copy at the start of the session because it also serves as an observation annotation sheet and the basis for the post session discussion.



d. Teaching the first study session

What works

Use the study session planner on the following page to plan the study session. It works best blown up to A3. It also acts as the observation sheet (if photocopied and provided to the observers in the study session) and is the key point of reference for the post session discussion.

Take real care over the joint assessment of the stages which the three case children are working at. You can make reference to 'Development Matters' It is really important that the group clearly writes what they want each child to be able to do during the session and what they will be looking for as evidence of this.

Because the study session is jointly planned, it is jointly owned by the group. This means the focus for the observers is less on the practitioner and more on the learners – the focus children. They should try to start each observation as if zoomed-in on the focus child and then pan back to allow a bigger group or the whole class to come into frame.

Observers should try to capture the focus children's responses at different points in the session – and how they match or differ from what was predicted at that stage. Note also any critical incidents. If there is a common pattern (e.g. all focus children misunderstand something in the same way) note it in the right hand column.

Note the time against each annotation if you can.

At the conclusion, look for the evidence of learning and development for each child against what was planned. What are key points for the next session for the focus children, their groups or the class? What might you want to ask them in their post session interview? Jot this down in 'initial thoughts' at the bottom of the page.

Notes

'What's very powerful is that people felt that because they'd planned together, it made it okay if it went wrong.'

Study session planning, observation and discussion sheet

Subject,

Focus strand

Year group

Practitioner/observer

What this study session is aiming to teach (it may be a section of a longer teaching sequence)

What teaching approach is the study session aiming to develop? *We are improving...*

Current attainment and success criteria Describe what you are looking for from them by end of session in the identified aspect	Case child A Current approximate learning and development Emerging / Expected / Exceeding (delete) Success criterion for this focus		Case child B Current approximate learning and development Emerging / Expected / Exceeding (delete) Success criterion for this focus		Case child C Current approximate learning and development Emerging / Expected / Exceeding (delete) Success criterion for this focus		
Stage of session sequence	How you hope case child A will respond	<i>How they are observed to respond</i>	How you hope case child B will respond	<i>How they are observed to respond</i>	How you hope case child C will respond	<i>How they are observed to respond</i>	Patterns / issues
Stage ... (approximate time)							
Stage ... (approximate time)							
Final stage ... (approximate time)							
What were they able to do? (What progress have they made and how do you know?)							
Initial thoughts							

e. Interviewing case children after the session

What works

In this country lesson study groups often interview the focus children after the study session to get their perspectives on what worked for them, what they felt they learned and how they think session could be changed if it were taught again to another class in order to make it work even better.

The interview should be short (no more than 5 minutes) and can be done with all the case children in a group or individually.

Try to conduct the post session pupil interview at the first opportunity – ideally at the end of the session.

Try to capture some of their exact words in your notes.

Some people conduct the post study session child interviews with other children but who are in the same three learner groups as the case children. This can help triangulate findings – but it can also complicate the data set.

Notes

...they begin to take ownership of the whole learning process, they take responsibility for it and also they're helped. It's amazing because ... they're engaging with us, in helping us to help them to learn. Incredible stuff really, incredible stuff!

Suggested questions for a post session interview with the case children

I saw you doing....., were you enjoying that?
Was there anything you didn't enjoy today?

Tell me about what you have found out today?
What would you like to learn next?

What helps you to learn?
What could your teacher do to help you even more?

f. The post study session discussion

What works

Make sure the group can meet for at least 45 minutes as soon after the study session as possible. If you go beyond 36 hours much is lost.

One person should be chosen to chair the discussion and to make sure that the key points are recorded.

Someone else should be chosen to keep a record of what was agreed. They can use the proforma on page 10 for recording the post session discussion.

The chair should ensure that all points made or questions asked should start with an observation about one of the case children. For example *'At that point I observed child B writing 'xx xxxx xx' on his own. This suggested to me that....'* Or *'When the story session began child A moved to sit with (child) I wonder if...'*. This is an important feature of lesson study as it keeps the focus on the learning before moving to the teaching.

All study group members should contribute. The chair should keep the discussion focused on:

- what was planned for each child to learn
- what actually happened
- what accounts for any difference between these
- how much progress each made
- what aspect of the teaching approach could be adjusted to improve the progress of each child
- what you will do next time you use this teaching approach
- what you will not repeat another time.
- What is worth sharing with colleagues.

Then..

Agree – what your next steps are as a lesson study group. What will you focus on developing next time.

Sign and date the record.

Keep the notes in a professional learning log in the staffroom.

Notes

'...it's amazing how much you learn by explicating your ideas, so in challenging me, I have to justify why I think we should do this in this particular way and through that it really strengthens your own knowledge and gets you to a place you could not get on your own'

Post Session Discussion record

	Case child A	Case child B	Case child C
<p>What learning did you observe? Was this what was expected?</p> <p>What about others in the group of learners they typify?</p>			
<p>How did the approach being developed help or hinder? (Maybe a bit of both)</p> <p>What surprises were there?</p>			
<p>What aspect(s) of the teaching approach could be adjusted next time to improve the progress of each</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>So.what should we try next time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		

Initials

Date

g. Formally sharing the outcomes with others

What works

Arrange an opportunity ahead of the lesson study for the group to share with colleagues what they have done, learned and refined - especially in the key teaching technique being developed. If people know in advance that they will have to share their findings with others, then they will bear this in mind throughout the proceedings. This helps the lesson study group keep their thinking and their findings clear, more useable and replicable by others.

Video snips of the study sessions and digital photos embedded in PowerPoint presentations are a popular way of conveying session practice and processes. (You will need to ensure you have a setting policy on use of video and photos in place).

Arrange opportunities for members of the lesson study group to work with other practitioners in order to help coach the pedagogic technique they have evolved, adapted or refined.

Remember that articulating and explaining practice and making it visible to others

- (a) helps those learning from their peers improve their practice
- (b) improves the performance of the person doing the explaining or coaching.

This is because it makes visible what is often tacit knowledge of practice - which practitioners use but never express. Articulating this helps them become more aware of their knowledge themselves and therefore more able to improve it further.

Celebrate and value what has been learned and shared.

Create a 'learning wall' in the staffroom where a lesson study group can display their work – photos, notes, observations, discussion outcomes, pupil interviews and tentative conclusions. This creates lots of staffroom talk about professional learning long after the formal sharing is over.

Notes

'Because the typical sort of practitioner is extremely busy, they want to see that what you're putting forward is going to be of use to them and so little snippets, with a video is really helpful for that.'

h. Creating time for lesson study and building it into the organisation of the setting

What works

Lesson study is very good value for money if you really create the opportunity for its outcomes to feed into the practices of those involved in the study and others in the school.

Some settings have created dedicated professional learning time when lesson study groups plan and analyse their sessions from time normally allocated to professional development and management.

Careful use of planning time, staggered timetables or break times and any other means which allow some practitioners to be free to talk together, can create opportunities for planning or post session discussion which do not always demand supply cover.

Some heads have built Lesson study into their school teaching and learning policy by creating a staff professional learning policy. These gives practitioners and others entitlement to professional learning and CPD opportunities which include the models now recognised as having most impact on classroom practice. (See page 1).

One example of linking Lesson Study with performance management productively was achieved by treating participation in lesson study and sharing of the outcomes with colleagues - as a component of performance management. Staff involved felt that with lesson study they improved areas where they felt less confident rather than playing safe in an area of relative teaching strength.

It is important to keep lesson study separate from performance monitoring.

Some lesson study groups focusing on older pupils demonstrate the techniques they develop to other teachers in a public study session. Here pupils stay behind after school and the session is taught in the hall in front of an invited audience from neighbouring schools. A lively discussion follows. This is popular in Japan. This can be developed into 'Master Classes' within normal setting time in the Early Years.

Notes

'...what I've been surprised and really pleased about I think is that people who normally close the door and get on with what they do in a session, have suddenly thought 'Oh hang on, this is good for me, within my session. It's good for the kids within my session, it's practical, I'm doing something. And they've really got on board. And that's been remarkable in our place.'

i. Using leading practitioners to support and develop the professional learning from Lesson study and using the lesson study model as a platform for in-school coaching

What works

Notes

Leading practitioners or consultants can support the lesson study process if they:

- Demonstrate an approach in the setting immediately prior to a lesson study cycle beginning.
- Join a lesson study group as they plan a study session and contribute ideas and suggestions.
- Sit with a lesson study group and discuss the study session they have prepared – contributing to suggestions about how the pedagogic technique could be developed
- Join a study session as an observer (with equal status) and participate in the post session child interviews and discussion.

Additional interest and value can be created around lesson study if it is used by practitioners to develop a portfolio to evidence particular teaching standards, or to contribute towards professional or academic qualification or recognition.

When your practitioners have developed some practice which has had a clear impact on learning and progress of children and which you think others would be interested in – log the practice as a case-led study at

www.lessonstudy.co.uk

This is a website designed to help practitioners search for and share practice in classrooms and school improvement which have worked in one place and could work elsewhere.