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The Lesson Study Seminar and Practice 2014: Reflection on the Lesson Study Practice in Brunei Darussalam

co-organised by

Department of Schools

Ministry of Education

and

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education

Universiti Brunei Darussalam

THE LESSON STUDY SEMINAR AND PRACTICE 2014

REFLECTION ON THE LESSON STUDY PRACTICE IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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IN
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

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Endorsing the Future Study Journey to Brazil

Michael Whalley

University of Education

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PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Study abroad to be particularly known in Britain around 1965, and since then, the rate has grown by leaps and bounds thanks to guest faculty. One of the important factors to be considered when a student study abroad has been decided is regarding the language barrier, which is solved by the International of Students, Ministry of Education, Higher Education.

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Reminiscing the Lesson Study Journey in Brunei

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Abstract

This paper presents a reminiscence of the Lesson Study journey through the eyes and perspective of the author and is narrated in three main stages – the past, the present and the future. It initially relates how Lesson Study started in Brunei. It then relates how it began to be accepted by the teachers due to strong support from the Brunei Ministry of Education (how it grew from being practiced in one school to all primary schools now). It also stresses the importance of teachers' commitment, and finally, conveys the aspirations of the author for more widespread and successful practice of the Lesson Study in Brunei, in the future.

Keywords: Brunei Lesson Study Journey, Lesson Study as continuous professional development, Teacher Commitment.

Introduction

Lesson Study started to be popularly known in Brunei around 2005, and since then, its popularity has grown by leaps and bounds, thanks to many factors. One of the important factors is the teachers who, without doubt, have been steadfast in carrying out Lesson Study programmes organised by the Department of Schools, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam.

My involvement in Lesson Study was unplanned in the beginning, but in the end, I thank Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala for placing me among the hardworking and determined people who were passionate in their quest to make the standard of teaching and learning in Brunei enviable. I strongly believe that Lesson Study can enhance teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and hence enhance students' learning experiences.

In this short article, I will relate a short Lesson Study journey that I have experienced, with the intention to document some of the experiences which I consider valuable. This is also to acknowledge the contributions of some people who have worked hard to make Lesson Study a part of the continuous professional development for teachers in Brunei. I would also like to thank the people concerned, who gave me the opportunity to reminisce this journey in writing this article. This piece is written from my perspective and if I happen to forget to mention a few names, please forgive me, because it is not intentional.

The past: How it began

In 2006, the Ministry of Education in Brunei introduced the new Mathematics Syllabus both for Lower and Upper Primary levels of schooling (Khalid, 2006). The new curriculum for Mathematics was aligned with most of the pedagogical developments that were part of the educational reform efforts around the world, focusing on student-centred learning, and best practices such as mathematical thinking and problem solving, communication etc. (CDD, 2006). Although teachers were trained on these aspects of teaching during their teacher training years, in my opinion, the three to four years that they underwent such training was not long enough to influence their pedagogical habits. I believe that the style of learning that they experienced during their school years has a greater influence on their style of teaching.

Therefore, teachers' training needs to be supplemented with continuous training and upgrading in the form of continuous professional development (CPD). The best CPD would be the one that allows hundred percent involvement of the teachers, in a real, contextual manner. So I started searching the internet for this kind of CPD and stumbled upon Lesson Study and began reading about it. I was interested in what it offered to the teachers and hence would be of benefit to the students.

Towards the end of that year, I was invited to participate in the APEC-Tsukuba International Conference as a specialist. It was indeed unexpected but was a great opportunity for me to understand about Lesson Study and how it works. Alhamdulillah, this conference assembled together educators from many different APEC countries and we collaborated to come up with innovative teaching and learning of mathematics through Lesson Study (APEC-Tsukuba International Conference, 2007). This research group received most of its grant from APEC – Asia Pacific Economic Corporation. We met twice a year – once in Japan, where we shared the theme of the Lesson Study for the particular year, and then in Thailand where we shared our Lesson Study findings that was conducted in each economy, based on the theme discussed in Japan.

I was honoured to be able to represent Brunei, as a specialist, to this esteemed group. On representing the APEC member countries to this conference, each specialist was required to conduct and promote Lesson Study in schools. I was very fortunate in this case because the Director of Schools at that time, Datin Hj. Aishah Husain was very passionate about Lesson Study and full of support to the idea of conducting it in the primary schools. She encouraged us to offer Lesson Study workshops to the teachers of Brunei primary schools. The secondary schools were also urged to conduct Lesson Study. The workshop in 2008 was attended by representatives from almost every school in Brunei.

We conducted our first few Lesson Study cycles with the teachers in Kiarong Primary School. The teachers at the school willingly embraced the practice, encouraged by the principal of the school at that time, Cikgu Hajah Sainah. Then, in the beginning of 2009, under the direction of the Department of Schools, Lesson Study was formally launched in three Primary Schools involved – Kiarong, Sengkarai and Katok. However, due to the outbreak of the flu virus H1

N1, it was postponed after one cycle. The following year, the number of schools involved expanded to fourteen.

During the early stages, we received a few invitations to talk about Lesson Study to the teachers. On one occasion, teachers from Arabic Schools, Ministry of Religious Affairs, had a workshop with us in Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and Lesson Study was also introduced to them. On another occasion, I was invited with a few teachers and officers from the Department of schools, to present Lesson Study at "Majlis Dialog bersama Menteri Pendidikan" in April, 2009, which aimed to introduce Lesson Study to the top administrators of Brunei schools. Here we showed a video that was taken during one of our Lesson Study sessions, and had a mini critique session with the audience.

In December 2010, the conference of World Association of Lesson Study was held in University Brunei Darussalam (UBD), Brunei, where many of our teachers involved in Lesson Study presented their research. For some of the teachers, it was their first experience presenting research papers. The popularity of Lesson Study could be felt when many teachers studying either for their Master of Education and Master of Teaching started to choose Lesson Study as their research themes, wholly or partly. During my tenure at UBD, three Master of Education students and two Master of teaching students under my supervision conducted research that were connected to Lesson Study and I am sure there were many more under others lecturers' supervision then. Again, I was blessed with students who were also teachers passionate about Lesson Study, and my experience in Lesson Study was indeed enhanced due to them. I appreciate all the efforts they made then, even now.

The Present

The current practice of making Lesson Study compulsory in primary schools started in 2011. When this was first announced, I was worried and wondered whether we had enough experts to oversee the project successfully. However, the teachers seemed to be able to persevere, albeit some small mistakes made here and there. That is the attitude that I appreciate about the teachers involved in Lesson Study. They, together with the officers from the Ministry of Education, tried their best to overcome any challenges that came their way. Teachers seem to believe that Lesson Study is an effective continuous professional development practice (Suhaili & Khalid, 2011), which has impacted positively on their instruction (Suhaili, Shahrill & Khalid, 2014). Later, the Department of Schools of the Ministry of Education, organized the Lesson Study mini conference in 2011. I believe this is also a very good move because it helps to disseminate the practice of Lesson Study and inculcate the practice of research among the local teachers. This mini conference has the potential to grow and be known internationally, insya Allah.

The Future

The future is bright for the children of Brunei if the teachers continue to practice Lesson Study. I truly believe that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge will be enhanced through

continuously participating in Lesson Study. This will in the end benefit the students through enhanced teaching and learning methods trialled and run during the Lesson Study process (Suhaili& Khalid, 2011). Besides, the collaborative nature of Lesson Study will also inculcate the enhancement of relationships among teachers, and this will be part of the value that will therefore be felt and embraced by the students.

Conclusion

Brunei is still in the early stages of conducting/implementing Lesson Study among its teachers. However, teachers should not give up because the success of Lesson Study won't be seen in a short span of time. The future of the generation depends a lot on the teachers. We should remember that effective teaching methods and good teaching habits need time to be inculcated. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) was quoted as saying that:

“Improving something as complex and culturally embedded as teaching requires the efforts of all players, including students, parents, and politicians. But teachers must be the primary driving force behind change. They are the best positioned to understand the problems that students face and to generate possible solutions” (p. 135).

Liptak, (2002, p. 7) considers Lesson Study as an investment of time, and commented “Like most good investments, we expect that the growth and dividends from the time we invest in Lesson Study will accrue gradually over a long period of time. Improving our teaching in depth is hard, time-consuming work, which needs to be done collaboratively and in a supportive setting.” I believe that this will happen in Brunei.

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