Lesson Study “Open House”

The open house allows a school to share its lesson study work with other schools, although not all schools in Japan conduct open houses. They are so popular that many observers watch from the corridor or through the window.

Invited guests (usually teachers and principals), meet with the lesson study team before the research lesson and are taken through the thinking behind the lesson and what to look out for in the lesson. They are given a very detailed lesson plan and are asked to observe how the pupils are learning. The lesson is then taught and observed by all. There is then a tea break followed by a formal review of what has taken place in the lesson with special emphasis on “seeing the lesson through the pupils’ eyes”.

If you want to experience lesson study in action then register your interest by emailing Derek Robinson NOW! (djrjp@gmail.com). For the “Open House” session places will be restricted to 40.

“A typical research lesson in action”

What is Lesson Study?

Lesson Study is a method for improving teaching based on systematic and careful observation of lessons concentrating on learners and in particular on the learning. There is evidence that it has achieved considerable success in improving teaching in Japanese schools and it now forms the basis of professional development in Primary Education in Japan as well as in some parts of the USA. However, it has not only had a positive effect on the learning in these schools, it has had a profound effect on the teachers and their practice by promoting a more collaborative approach to their work.

Lesson Study is built around the concept of a research lesson which the joint responsibility of the team. It is not used for evaluating the teacher but the quality of learning that takes place.

In 2005 the Mathematics Department of Bishop Luffa CE School in Chichester began to use “lesson study”. It has rapidly become the department’s main vehicle for professional development.

“It makes no sense to decide how one is going to teach before one has made some study of how people learn.”

(Eric Sotto When Teaching becomes Learning 1994)
The lesson study process is guided by a broad, school-wide goal identified by the teachers to serve as the research focus. The goal often comes from identifying the characteristics of an ideal student and then assessing actual students to identify gaps.

Step 1: Collaboratively plan the study lesson
A small sub-group of teachers plan a lesson together. This lesson is designed to address a particular set of mathematical learning goals but it is also designed to encourage progress towards the wider goal or goals identified. The planning group design the lesson as a piece of research. This allows them to try out a particular strategy, to explore an approach that they think will improve a particular aspect of the learning. The teachers try to anticipate every eventuality possible. They explore possible misconceptions that the students might have, they design questions and anticipate a range of possible responses and they plan strategies to deal with these possibilities. The lesson is ‘owned’ by the whole group.

Step 2: Seeing the study lesson in action
One of the planning teachers takes on the responsibility for teaching the lesson. The teacher treats this lesson as a piece of research and so tries to stick to the strategies and sequence planned. This lesson is observed by a whole group of teachers in the ‘lesson study’ group. In Japan this might be all the teachers in the school plus observers from the local university and other educationalists - there might be as many as 30 or 40 observers in the room. Observers will have particular tasks set for their observations. One might be looking at the learning of one student or a group of students, one might be concentrating on the behaviour of a group. Another might be looking for progress against one of the wider goals. The one common feature is that the observation is directed towards the learners and their learning rather than the teacher and the teaching.

Step 3: Discussing the study lesson
After the lesson everyone meets to discuss what has happened. In Japan, the first person to speak is always the teacher and everyone is encouraged to start with something positive. However, throughout this process, it is the lesson not the teacher that is being scrutinised. Through this process the strategies and approaches are analysed; individual and group beliefs are challenged and debated. All through the process the lesson is analysed in terms of its stated goals

Step 4: Revising the lesson (optional)
Some groups will stop their work on a study lesson after they have discussed their observations of it, but others will chose to go on to revise the lesson so that they can continue to work from it.

Step 5: Teaching the new version of the lesson (optional)
A second member of the group will next publicly teach the study lesson to a different group of teachers who come to observe and so the cycle continues.

Step 6: Sharing reflections about the new version of the lesson
The teachers then come together to discuss their reactions to what happened in the second version of the study lesson. The conversation again centres on teachers sharing their comments and suggestions. These discussions are all about finding out how students learn best.

Step 7: Research bulletins—a vehicle for sharing lesson study insights and strategies
Lesson study groups can also learn from each other by sharing written reports created by a particular team. Open houses and other occasions when outsiders visit the school provide natural venues for the distribution of these reports. The report contains all of the documents relating to the study, all of the resources used, a dvd and other photographs of the lesson.

"If you keep doing what you keep doing, you’ll keep getting what you keep getting.” - Will Rogers