

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING LESSON STUDY AT HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Without ignoring changes including the one on curriculum, it is the fact that teaching and learning process remains showing similar but unique phenomena. One of the phenomena is related to the teaching practice in a large class. Teaching in a large class often results in problems on the material delivery to students and class management. The teacher is challenged to deal with the problems. Lesson study offers an alternative to deal with such problems. The study involves the teaching teacher as well as the colleagues, authority and students. The process including planning, doing and reflecting not only enhances teachers' professional development but also improves classroom teaching and learning activities. Through this paper, the writer intends to elaborate challenges in implementing lesson study at higher education-English education in this case. The challenges range from the beginning when deciding to conduct the lesson study to the learning process and the peer discussion after teaching. Therefore, the points discussed here include the practice on conducting lesson study at an English classroom, the challenges and the solutions. It is expected that the shared ideas on the lesson study can be disseminated to the wider coverage of education.

Key terms: *lesson study, professional development, teaching and learning activity, challenges*

A. INTRODUCTION

It is the fact that one of the challenges in teaching and learning is to manage a large class. There are problems of large classes, as summarized by Todd (2006: 3), the problems are related to learning, management/activities, physical/practical, affective factors, interaction, feedback and evaluation, and miscellaneous. The challenge becomes greater when the subject matter is knowledge or content-based. The activity in the classroom usually tends to be monotonous: a teacher lecturing and the students listening to him/her. Boredom happens to not only the teacher but also the students.

Efforts are needed to cope with such problems/challenge. Most suggestions to solve the problems focus on the ones on management, running activities and evaluation, but it is important to research into large classes (Todd, 2006: 6). The courage to promote lesson improvements in a classroom at English Education Study program at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta resulted in conducting a lesson study. A group of lecturers/teachers agreed to focus on managing the large class to achieve the learning goals by conducting a lesson study to facilitate the process towards the goal achievement.

B. DISCUSSION

Lesson Study

According to Baba (2007: 2), lesson study is a process in which teachers progressively strive to improve their teaching methods by working with other teachers to examine and critique one another's teaching techniques. It is a cycle of professional development focused on teachers planning, observing, and revising "research lessons" (Lewis & Tshuchida, 1998 in Hurd and Licciardo-Musso, 2005). In the Indonesian context, lesson study is defined as a model of professional development for educators by studying teaching and learning activities collaboratively and continually, based on the principles of collegiality and mutual-learning to develop a learning community among educators (Hendayana, et.al., 2007 in Suratno and Iskandar, 2010: 41-42).

In this article, the writer deals with the lesson study in English Education Study Program at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta. The stages are adapted from "Pilot" Lesson Study in Indonesia (Koseki, 2012: 214). The lesson study conducted started with the formation of lesson study group, continued with selection of lesson study lecturers, development of lesson content and teaching plans, lesson-open lesson and reflection. During the open lesson, colleagues do an observation.

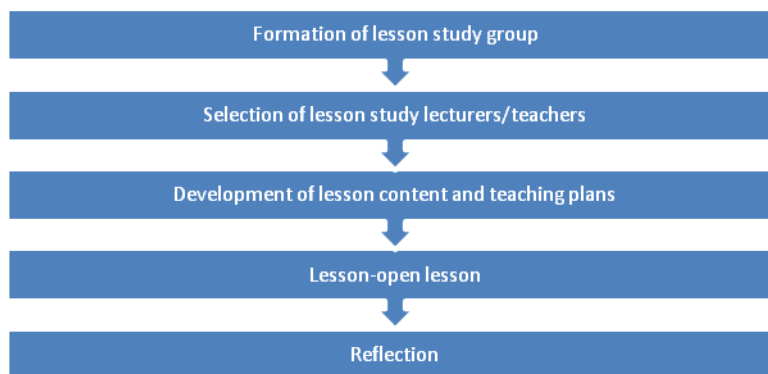


Chart of the lesson study at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

The subject selected is *Curriculum and Syllabus Design* learned by semester 4 students (N=50 students) at English Education Study Program. It is a subject combining knowledge and skills in analyzing and designing a syllabus for language learning. To facilitate students to achieve the learning objective, the lecturer/teacher works with other colleagues from the same institution for the success of students learning the subject. There are a model teacher, classroom observers and students. The observers may be both from internal and or external institutions. The internal observers are fellow teachers.

To succeed the lesson study, the team takes 3 stages into account. Each cycle of the lesson study consists of planning, doing and reflecting. Similar to an action research, the result of the reflection in the first cycle will be referred to set a plan for the following cycle of the lesson study.

When planning the first cycle of the lesson study, the teacher team agrees to have the common goals to achieve through the classroom activities. The goals refer to the existing curriculum defined by the study program. The team collaboratively plan and prepare the classroom activities. Materials to teach, techniques to implement and evaluation system to use are discussed considering the big number of the students in the class.

When the model teacher delivers the teaching materials and managing the class, the other group members are doing a classroom observation. This is what is called *open lesson*. Using the observation sheet and media to record the on-going teaching and learning activity, the observers participated in the lesson study. Non-classroom teachers as observers may take their role as *knowledgeable others* who may serve as the facilitators of individual lesson study groups, moderators of postlesson discussion, or final commentators (T. Watanabe, 2010: 177). After this process, the model teacher and observers have some reflection to discuss the teaching and learning activities and to prepare the next cycle/open lesson of the study.

Open Lessons for a Large Class

Although driven or led by the teacher, the lesson study puts the emphasize on students' engagement during the lesson. Therefore, activities that involve their active participation are a priority.

The first open lesson in *Curriculum and Syllabus Design* class was to enable students to explain the differences between curriculum and syllabus design and to analyze syllabus elements. The activity was designed to apply jigsaw model. Each of the student groups comprising 6-7 members discussed 6 discussion topics leading to their achievement of the learning objectives.

To observe the model teacher performance and learning and teacher process, an observation checklist was designed. The aspects to observe were chronologically composed: pre-learning, whilst-learning, during group work, post-learning, and overall class management. Using the checklist, non-classroom teachers observed the doing stage. After the observation, the observers and model teacher did reflection. The result shows that some group members in each group didn't actively participate in the discussion. The lesson study team concluded that the reasons are because of the number of the students in each group and limited time for group discussion and class presentation.

The next open lesson was done to make improvement, especially the one on the learning process and students' achievement. The objectives of recognizing the types of syllabus and providing examples of the materials were approached by another group work enabling a smaller number of students to have intensive work on the subject matter. A group of three students played different but changeable roles. Two students did question and answer while the third student observed and judged the answer. Such a learning process successfully made more students actively engaged.

However, the team at the same time also shared the common idea that the activity involving 3 students in a group had made the students practice rote learning. It has little chance of creating long-term retention since it takes in isolated bits and pieces of information that are not connected with one's existing cognitive structures (Brown, 2001: 57). In addition, enjoying the group work and model teacher's weak time management resulted in the fact that the students didn't have enough time to answer questions at the period of assessment.

After that, based on the reflection result, the team of the lesson study planned another activity for the following open lesson. The learning activity was designed to not only remember or know the materials but also comprehend, and apply the materials learned. An adaptation of round table discussion was set to reach the learning objective that is to set learning indicators for different skills. The round table discussion demanded each group consisting of 4-5 students to derive indicators from a set of competency standard and basic competence. Students' involvement was good, but observers found that the time management needed improvement. The model teacher was required to mind the time management since it still mattered.

At the last open lesson, student participation and time management became the focus. A gallery walk was employed to facilitate the students to remember, comprehend, apply, and synthesize the materials. They were expected to be able to write learning indicators, define assessment's form and technique, and complete syllabus elements. After working in groups, the students put the result of the work on the wall. Some stayed near the work in case other groups asked; some other went around watching and giving written feedbacks on others' work. The session ended with an assessment measuring the students' achievement. The main point of the reflection emphasized the importance on monitoring during gallery walk to ensure that learning really happened.

Open lessons covering planning-doing-reflecting stages affect the students, teacher and observers as well. Through the open lessons, the students are actively involved in the learning activities. The teacher has opportunity to work together with colleagues in planning the lesson and realizing his or her beliefs in teaching. During the reflection stage, the teacher and *knowledgeable others* (observers) learn to listen one another, to share and to trust one another. As stated by Stigler and Hiebert (1999) in Sjostrom and Olson (2010: 272-273), there are principles of lesson study that can be the basis for professional development:

- (a) expect improvement to be continual, gradual, and incremental;
- (b) maintain a constant focus on student learning goals;
- (c) focus on teaching, not teachers;
- (d) make improvements on teaching in context;
- (e) provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate as they plan instruction and analyze teaching; and
- (f) build a system in which teachers can learn from their experiences.

The professional development supported by a lesson study, however, remains leaving some challenges for teachers to respond to. The following part of the paper will discuss them.

Challenges and Possible Solutions

The first challenge of the lesson study is to have preparation before the planning stage. It is important that the team communicate with the authority and related parties (e.g. Head of study program and lesson study center) to support the lesson study. Scheduling, selecting the team members and linking to external institutions (e.g. other university, ICLS-Indonesia Center for Lesson Study <http://icls.upi.edu/v5/>, JICA-Japan International Cooperation Agency <http://www.jica.go.jp/project/english/indonesia/0800042/news/index.html>, etc.) are some to consider before deciding the team for lesson study.

After having the common goals, members of the teaching team collaboratively design the teaching and learning activities to achieve the goals and learning objectives. The ideas may be initiated by the teacher model or by members. The process of preparing the class does not only focus on the learning activities, it also deals with the teaching materials and hand out, media, references, observation sheet, questionnaires and other technical things. All the preparations should be shared and agreed to be performed at the learning sessions. This stage demands the team including the model teacher to spend much time and energy before the doing stage.

Spending time for reflection is also a challenge. After the doing stage, all the team members gather to share the result of the observation and the ideas for the proposed learning activity for the next open lesson. Limited time often hinders the members to have a thorough discussion. Taking advantage from the technology helps them to continue the discussion.

Furthermore, the challenge is related to sustainability. After going through all the cycles of the first lesson study, the sustainability of the program is worth to question. Will the subject to study be the one closely associated with the previous done in the former lesson study? What will

be the focus or the goal for the next lesson study? How should all the agenda of the next lesson study be accommodated by the authority or by the study program/faculty? Can the mutual learning done be realized if the teacher works without lesson study? If so, how should the teacher prepare him or herself and the students for the best result of the learning activity? Will this be different if the subject is knowledge-based or skill? Support from teachers, authority and education network is the one to obtain.

Toward the development and future of lesson study, Watanabe (2010: 289) views the challenges associated with the lack of a cadre of experienced lesson study teachers, teacher educators, and researchers; and efforts to acquire a learning stance where leaders and facilitators see themselves as co-learners with the participating teachers.

C. CONCLUSION

Lesson study is a process that is beneficial for the teachers and students. Implemented for a large class at higher education, the lesson study is advantageous for classroom management, teaching and learning activities and teachers' professional development. Along with the challenges in conducting the lesson study, the key for success of the lesson study in the future should take into account the planning, mutual work between teachers and related parties, and sustainability.

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