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The Impact of Study Lesson towards ESL Learners: Malaysia Perspective

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Abstract

This was a qualitative case study aimed to investigate the impact of using one of the methods from the context of Professional Learning Community (PLC) in a rural school. Interviews and Observations were done purposively with a few students from Form 3 and teachers from the English Panel from the school. The data collected was analysed with open coding system. Professional learning community (PLC) is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups. Result showed that the rural schools are not really ready with the new approach and more of the PLC approaches can be done to improve the level of confidence.

Keywords: Professional Learning Community, Lesson Study, Collaboration

Introduction

There are many interpretation over Professional Learning Community (PLC). One of the definition is that PLC can bring community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students. Others are like to engage management, teachers and students to be more active and more involved in learning (Hord, 1997).

The expert of PLC, Richard Dufour (2004) mentioned that in PLC, the focus is more on learning than in teaching. It is more to collaboratively work and holding oneself accountable for results (DuFour, 2004).

The main idea behind the much talked about PLC was to integrate two concepts that in the past, have been quite distinctive from each other; professional and community. In the statement from Louis (1999), professionalism means to serve client needs based on specialised knowledge, for example a teacher; and community means having the support, care and mutual responsibility and understanding within a group (Marks & Loius, 1999).

Katz and Dack (2012) argue that humans usually apply the mental shortcuts in order not to think. According to Katz and Dack, experience contribute to the process of learning which causes permanent change in the knowledge or behaviour. They need too many activities for

participation in a protocol or process to guarantee real life learning and so much of the activities, the real learning is lost in the shuffle. Because of these difficulties many teachers are turning to the internet for PLCs. Groups such as Twitter, Facebook, and other social media websites allow them to interact with teachers all across the country to brainstorm and exchange ideas (Riley & Stoll, 2004).

Lesson study is one of the features in PLC which embodies many features that are effective in changing teacher practice in teaching and learning, such as using more practical materials to focus on meaningful problems, taking explicit account of the contexts in teaching and learning and the experiences of teachers It also provide on-site teacher support within a collegial network.

Lesson study also promotes and maintains collaborative work among teachers in a systematic way in intervention and support. During lesson study, teachers collaborate to: 1) formulate long-term goals for student learning and development; 2) plan and conduct lessons based on research and observation in order to apply these long-terms goals to actual classroom practices for particular academic contents; 3) carefully observe the level of students' learning, their engagement, and their behaviors during the lesson; and 4) hold debriefing sessions with their collaborative groups to discuss and revise the lesson accordingly (Norwood, 2007).

However, all mentioned previous studies done on PLC were carried out in the L1 countries. Therefore, there is a need to find out the reaction and impact of PLC in the L2 countries, like Malaysia. It is new in the education system in Malaysia to be implementing the distinguished method in teaching and learning, therefore, such investigation should be carried out in order to find out the impact from the teachers and students.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted during in April 2015 at a secondary school in a state in the West Malaysia. Participants were a few Form 3 students and few teachers, which is also called the Focus Group Discussion (FDG). In this approach, the moderator does not directly facilitates the discussion. The moderator has smaller number of questions to begin with, each in general nature. Subjects talk during the sessions and moderator attends according to the process in ensuring that all subjects have equal opportunity in speaking their opinions. The Morgan framework in conducting such Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) is to give enough freedom to the subjects in exploring and exchanging their ideas in response to the semi-structured interview questions, which ensuring also, all subjects took part in the process.

Additionally, the five important benefits in having focus groups are, mainly that the technique is a socially oriented research method capturing real life data in a social environment, it is flexible, it has high face validity, its results are fast, and the cost is low (Krueger, 1988).

Semi open questions were used in the interviews. Focus groups are considered as an excellent device for generating questionnaire items for a subsequent survey (Morgan, 1988). The interviews were all taken place before and after the lesson Participants were asked on their expectation before the lesson and their feeling during and after the lesson. Teachers involved were also asked on their opinion in collaborative teaching and learning. The rationale for such method is that

The observation were done and notes were taken about what have been seen including photos from the pre-post study lesson discussion and video from the while-study lesson. All the interviews and observations took a time frame of a week to two weeks to gather all data and information.

Researcher's role is a complete observer in this study. The reason is because the study is considered as sensitive and if the role of researcher is known, information might not be able to be obtained. Notes were taken as well as pictures when observation was being done. Observation was also being done with appointments from the head of Department.

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed via open coding method. After getting the open coding, they were put into categories to answer the research questions of the study.

For strategies for credibility of the research, researcher applied two types of strategies in promoting the reliability and validity of the study. Peer review with a classmate at the university by having discussions regarding the process of the study confirmed the data collection is on the correct path. The tentative interpretations were being reviewed and was agreed by the same classmate. Member checking was done in the school with one of the involved colleagues in order to check if the data collected and interpretation were plausible.

Results

Results of the study were based on the research questions of :

1. What does Study Lesson means?
2. Who are those involved in the method of Study Lesson?
3. How do the teachers react in the idea of PLC?
4. What is the impact towards the students by using this method of teaching and learning?

RQ	Definition	Answers to RQ	Examples
1	Explanation to the meaning of Study Lesson	Means having the collaboration between teachers to see through a lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tr#1: 'I think Study Lesson is be together and plan something for the lesson we want to teach over a cup of coffee' (Interview1; 28 April; 10.40am) • Tr#2: 'Maksudnyer, buat persediaan bersama sebelum masuk sama-sama [meaning, plan together before going in together] (Interview1; 28 April; 10.40am) • Tr#3: 'Study Lesson will take time and wasting our time too because we need to find time when we are all free' (Interview3; 24 April; 8.05am)

2 Those involved in the Study Lesson	The management, teachers and also students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tr#4: 'Management should watch if the teachers are doing the Study Lesson' [Interview1; 28 April; 10.40am]. This statement showed that the the management is the most important body to see through the implementation and smoothness of the approach being used.
3 Reaction from the teachers	Different teachers perceived differently in the reaction of the Study Lesson used. Some teachers find it helpful but some are not.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tr#5: 'This is very helpful to let us know that we are doing well and we are teaching the right thing to the students. Two heads work better than one' (Interview3; 24 April; 8.05am) • Tr#1: 'This is so wasting time, and when can we all meet? And when can one lesson be done? when all of us are teaching 6-7 periods a day' (Interview2; 23 April; 8.20am)
4 Impact using Study Lesson towards students	Some students find it fun and they do not mind the group of teachers entering their class. Some mind because they are nervous being watched.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St#1: 'I like this because, I find the lesson interesting and I like to move around, feeling like having the freedom, just like studying in university' [Interview 4; 29 April; 01.05 p.m.] • St#2: 'Don't like because, must speak English all the time and is very tiring' [Interview 4; 29 April; 01.15p.m.]

Table 1: Findings to answer research question 1 to 4

Findings from Observations

The students were quiet in the beginning of the class and they were wondering why were there two other teachers entering their class together with their English teacher. It was rather difficult for the teacher to start the conversation because of the nervousness among the students. The class is the second class of Form 3 and they are being considered young at age and mentality. The teacher started the introduction by asking few questions about health (e.g. 'What did you eat this morning?' , 'What did your mom make for you this morning?') Few students started to answer with broken English. The teacher prompted the students again by asking if the food they had that day is healthy. This brought them to think more detail. They started to have small talks among friends to find the answers the teacher might want to hear. They were afraid to be the first to say out the answers, so, the scenario was pretty just sound of whispering and small talks. About five minutes later, students started to get warmer and started talking to one another as

well as the teacher. The classroom became more exciting later in the lesson when they teacher gave out the group work where students need to create menu for the school canteen in big mahjung paper. Students were excited to get their ideas delivered and to show their creativity. All the mahjung papers were pasted around the classroom wall when all were done. The students got the chance to have their gallery walk around the class and look around their friends' work. Discussion was done after the gallery walk. In this session, the discussion was seen to be active and very student centred where all the students were trying their best to say something, be it proper or broken English. The objective of the lesson was achieved with good ending. Students moved around which showed that they class was not a boring one. It is noticed that the weaker group of students were able to join in the conversation and activities at their own pace. One boy in particular, he seemed to be rather introvert to compare to the rest and was obvious, but later towards the end of the lesson, he was smiling and talking, somewhat in his broken English. [Observation; 29 April; 11.55am]

Discussion

From the result above, all the research questions in this study were answered. Study Lesson, overall shows both pros and cons to the students and also to the teachers involved. Some students are open minded in accepting guests coming into their classes and they do not mind, some do mind. They feel uncomfortable with the other teachers around in the class, watching them or speaking to them.

This is a rural school, therefore, students are little conservative in their thinking. Take for example, if the class teacher is on maternity leave and another teacher comes to take over for two months, to accept the teacher would take a month, then they will enjoy the new teacher's company for another one before she/he would leave them and they will be emotional attached. The students in the rural area are generally weaker and slower in learning to compare to the urban students.

By doing Study Lesson, teachers are able to share and learn ideas from other teachers and lessons will not be boring for the students anymore. It will be difficult to find suitable timing for all teachers to meet up and discuss on each of the lesson, teachers should come out with suggestions how meeting up once a week can benefit all parties. Study Lesson is a type of approach where professionalism is being viewed as teamwork rather than working individually. The management can benefit by having better result in teaching and learning process as well as the improvement of the exam result. It might be still new and rather difficult for the teachers and students to digest the idea of PLC, by practising it will make it normal and more comfortable for all parties.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that PLC is not yet accepted in the rural schools in the L2 environment and it is something to research on further in order to see the improvement of using the approach in teaching and learning.

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