



NARRATIVE

OBJECT OF  
LEARNING

COLLABORATIVE  
CYCLES

CURRICULUM  
DEVELOPMENT

PROCESS MODEL

TEACHING FOR  
UNDERSTANDING

WALS-ROUTLEDGE LESSON STUDY SERIES

# LINKING THEORY WITH PRACTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

A Hybrid Model of Lesson Study Research in Action

Edited by John Elliott  
and Vicky Christoforatu

ROUTLEDGE



“Education is a wasteful political football. In England, changes of government force the teaching profession to relinquish practices expected by previous governments and adopt those of the latest. This book shows us classroom teachers and leaders learning at master’s level to use Lesson Study: a rigorous process to research, theorise and transform practice – profoundly improving their pupils’ learning and their own expertise. Authentic voices recount stories of change and we sense a growing agency from these professionals, increasingly equipped to innovate barriers to pupils’ learning and armed with enough first-hand evidence to confidently challenge whenever the latest orthodoxy falls short.”

**Dr Pete Dudley**, University of Cambridge and former President of WALS

“Lesson Study is a powerful tool to engage teachers in professional development and to develop the school itself. This book is an excellent account of research by academics and teachers on how a master’s-level course on Lesson Studies integrates theory and practice and contributes to transforming the culture of teaching and learning. It is a valuable resource for teachers and school leaders who wish to implement Lesson Studies in their schools. Highly recommended!”

**Peter Posch**, Emeritus Professor, University of Klagenfurt, Austria

“A major focus in lesson study is how learning opportunities for students can be enhanced. This book provides insights into when teachers use theory to improve their teaching. Through several examples of teachers’ narratives about Lesson Studies on different topics when using theory, it shows the effect theoretical tools can have in Lesson Studies. The book is a valuable contribution to teachers’ craft and to the development of practice-based research.”

**Angelika Kullberg**, Professor at University of Gothenburg and executive committee member of WALS

“It is my pleasure to comment on the work of John Elliott and Vicky Christoforotou: *Linking Theory with Practice in the Classroom*. A document of immense value for teachers at any stage of the school system, from school to university. This book’s relevant contributions focus on breaking the limits that we have imposed on ourselves in conventional teaching between theory and practice, research, reflection and action, school and university, academy and community, cognitive development, and the socio-emotional dimension... From the voices of teachers who become researchers of their own professional practice, teachers immerse themselves in an endless process of cycles of cooperative research-action to solve authentic problems of learning and teaching in diverse educational contexts, within the complex and uncertain social and educational realities that we inhabit in contemporary times. Professor John Elliott’s extensive and consistent experience in research, theorizing

and action in the educational field, for more than 60 years, is reflected in this new contribution to educational innovation of relevance and quality. Those of us who admire his career as an inspiring teacher celebrate this new and suggestive publication.”

**Angel I. Pérez Gómez**, Profesor emérito de la facultad de ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Málaga, Spain

“In an education climate whereby research and evidence are the levers for change, this book and the research and voices contained within are a vital and timely contribution. As educators we can sometimes feel somewhat ‘other’ to the academic community. As education leaders it can be challenging to navigate the powerful from the trendy. I am passionate about the role Lesson Study can play in bringing the worlds of theory and practice together, and whilst books like this exist from other parts of the world it is a mark of the depth of professionalism that exists within East Anglia’s teaching community that we are in a position to bring this together now. Eternal gratitude to John Elliot for bringing Lesson Study to my life and to both Vicky Christoforatos and John for bridging the narrowing divide. I feel Lawrence Stenhouse would be proud.”

**Lucy Austin**, Headteacher East Point Academy, Inspiration Trust, UK

# Linking Theory with Practice in the Classroom

Focusing on the professional learning journeys of practising teachers and their tutors, this book takes readers through the experiences of teachers on the Developing Innovative Pedagogies through the Lesson Study module at the University of East Anglia.

Building on the perspectives of teachers practising Lesson Study, the book delves into the design of a series of action research cycles to solve authentic learning and teaching problems in a variety of educational settings. In addition to theoretical tools and concepts on pedagogy, this book gives voice to teachers who become researchers while crossing the boundaries of school and university and the boundaries of theory and practice. The teacher researchers ask their own questions, test their hypotheses and work collaboratively with their school colleagues to experiment with teaching strategies aimed at learning with understanding. The chapters feature the voices of the pupils themselves and their experiences of learning within a range of educational settings and phases.

Written for teachers, leaders in education, teacher educators and researchers, this book shows that the combination of good learning theories and teacher collaboration help bridge the gap between theory and practice in teachers' professional learning and enable learners to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

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## **WALS-Routledge Lesson Study Series**

Series editors: Christine Kim-Eng Lee, Catherine Lewis, Kiyomi Akita and Keith Wood

This series aims to provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners in Lesson Study to share their work beyond the boundaries of their countries to an international audience. Lesson Study is increasingly popular as a tool for improving the quality of education and schools around the world. As many countries are adapting and contextualizing Japanese Lesson Study to their own needs in response to educational and curriculum reforms cognizant that what matters most is what happens in classrooms and its impact on teachers and students. As Lesson Study originates from Japan, there is also a need for English Language readers around the world to understand more deeply the underlying philosophies, policies and practices of Japanese Lesson Study in the cultural contexts of their schools and classrooms. As well as original works in English from leading figures in Lesson Study, this series will also make available outstanding Lesson Study publications originally written in Japanese but extended and revised for an English audience.

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*Angelika Kullberg, Åke Ingerman and Ference Marton*

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*Edited by Eric C.K. Cheng and Bruce Lander*

### **Linking Theory with Practice in the Classroom**

A Hybrid Model of Lesson Study Research in Action

*Edited by John Elliott and Vicky Christoforatos*

# **Linking Theory with Practice in the Classroom**

A Hybrid Model of Lesson Study Research  
in Action

**Edited by**

**John Elliott and Vicky Christoforatu**

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# Foreword

The WALS-Routledge Lesson Study series was created in 2018 to provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners of Lesson Study and Learning Study to share their work with an international audience. Lesson Study is increasingly popular as a tool for improving the quality of instruction and of schools around the world. Educators in many countries are adapting and contextualizing Japanese Lesson Study to their own local needs and curriculum reforms, with the core recognition that what matters most is what happens in classrooms and how it affects teachers and students. The series also allows English-language readers around the world to access information on Lesson Study in Japan, its country of origin, in order to understand the underlying philosophies, policies and practices of Japanese Lesson Study in the contexts of Japanese schools and classrooms. In addition to making available original works in English from Lesson Study researchers and practitioners around the world, this series makes available some outstanding Lesson Study publications originally written in Japanese but extended and revised for an English audience.

There is tremendous international interest in Japanese Lesson Study. Lesson Study allows educators to achieve in practice ideas advocated by educational theorists – for example, to make student thinking central to instruction, to mobilize teachers' leadership for change, and to transform schools into learning communities for both students and teachers (Lewis & Lee, 2017). A strong indicator of growing interest around the world is the representation of countries at the annual conference of the World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS). The first WALS conference (2007) included educators from 15 countries but subsequent annual conferences have included educators from 30 or more countries around the world. The work of APEC (Asia Pacific Education Consortium) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) has led to a spread of Lesson Study to developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America.

The series editors are proud to provide publishing outlets for researchers and practitioners to disseminate their insights and research findings from the adaptation and contextualization of Lesson and Learning Study around the world. Lesson and Learning Study allows us to build a cumulative, shareable and improvable knowledge base for teaching (Hiebert, Gillimore and Stigler, 2002)

arising from iterative cycles of instructional improvement. By sharing their work, researchers and educators around the world can go beneath the surface features of Lesson and Learning Study to grasp its core underlying principles. The rapid rise of Lesson Study in many countries has led to some misconceptions about Lesson Study that this series can illuminate and reshape.

We hope that you enjoy this new addition to the series and will consider contributing your work to a future volume, so that we can continue to learn from Lesson Study and Learning Study colleagues around the world.

Christine Kim-Eng Lee, Catherine Lewis, Kiyomi Akita and Keith Wood



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**Part 1**

**Introduction**



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# 1 Developing Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning through Lesson Study

A Flexible Course for Teachers that Integrates Theory with Practice in Educational Settings.

*John Elliott*

In 2012, I was asked to design a master's-level module that would enable teams of teachers serving in local schools and other educational organisations to carry out Lesson Studies. Lesson Study had become strongly associated with a collaborative and iterative or cyclical model of teacher research, initially developed in Japan over 100 years ago. Following its discovery in 1997 through research sponsored by the TIMMS testing programme (Stigler and Hierbert, 1999), Lesson Study has now rapidly spread on a global scale to many countries, including the USA, UK, Sweden, Spain, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Lesson Study is also supported by a World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS) and an *International Journal of Lesson and Learning Studies* (IJLLS), of which I served as Chief Editor from 2012 to 2017.

The purpose of this chapter is to depict the module I designed and directed for nine years as an introduction to this volume, which seeks to portray the way the module impacted on the thinking and practice of the teachers who participated. This chapter provides a helpful contextual background for readers of the chapters which follow.

## **The main design features of the UEA module**

- 1 The module offers a flexible programme of work over a period of 6–9 months.
- 2 The module ideally stimulates the development of Lesson Study teams of 3–4 teachers. Individual teachers may join the course, if they can secure the support of peers willing to undertake a Lesson Study with them. In this context, work with a single colleague is accepted on pragmatic grounds.
- 3 Attendance at six three-hour sessions in UEA. The first three sessions of lectures and seminars introduce participants to some core ideas about the theory and practice of Lesson Study. Participants are introduced to the Japanese model of Lesson Study and two theoretical perspectives that



might inform their design of such a study: Variation Theory (Marton and Booth, 1997 and Lo, 2012) and the Process Model (Stenhouse, 1975). The former is a pedagogical theory that has been used to inform the design of Lesson Studies in some globalisation contexts, while the latter has been used to inform school-based curriculum planning and development more widely. In the opening sessions of the module, participants compare and contrast the pedagogical implications of the two perspectives as a resource for planning and undertaking their own lesson research. At this point, the module is also open to the possibility of exploring other theoretical resources for the design of Lesson Studies.

- 4 The fourth session involves participants in sharing and discussing their initial Lesson Study plans and responding to a Framework I have developed for helping teachers to plan a Lesson Study that is informed by Variation Theory.
- 5 Following the fourth session, there is a period of work in schools where participants are engaged with designing and conducting a collaborative Lesson Study with colleagues in their organisation. During this period, each team receives support from the course tutor and other 'knowledgeable others' (2–3 consultation visits to each group undertaking a Lesson Study). The process concludes with a fifth session at UEA when participants present a report of their Lesson Study to invited professional peers and teacher educators. The report is based on a research poster depicting the major features and findings of the study. This session is organised and designed as a formative assessment of the participants' lesson research.
- 6 The final UEA-based session introduces participants to the methodology of constructing a personal narrative about their professional learning during the whole course of the module. The session prepares each participant to undertake the summative assessment component of the module for the award of 30 master's-level credits. This consists of a 4000-word individual learning narrative during the long summer vacation.
- 7 Teachers may access the programme via one of the following options:

*As a CPD course (non-credit bearing).* Participants need to attend five taught sessions at UEA and undertake the formative assessment component of the course: a presentation to peers of a collaborative Lesson Study of value to their organisation. Practical support for this from a course tutor or 'knowledgeable other' is also on offer. Those who undertake this CPD option have an opportunity during the course to upgrade to the full 30 master's-level credit module.

*As a stand-alone 30 masters-level credit module.* Teachers can register to undertake the 30 master's-level credit module on a stand-alone basis. They are required to attend all six of the UEA-based sessions and complete both the formative and summative assessment assignments. Practical support from the course tutor or 'knowledgeable other' for conducting a collaborative Lesson Study in their school (a course requirement) is on offer.

*As an optional 30 masters level credit module on the MA in Educational Practice and Research.* Those looking to do the module as part of the MA course needed to secure a colleague or group in their school to undertake a collaborative Lesson Study (who do not need to attend the course).

### **Different perspectives on helping teachers to craft Lesson Studies**

The module design adopted a particular response to the frequently asked question: ‘What is a Lesson Study?’ This reflected my understanding of the main critical features that characterise the Japanese ‘methodology’ as follows (but see also Lewis, Perry and Friedkin, 2009):

It is carried out by a team of teachers.

It focuses on the collaborative development of a particular lesson, defined in terms of a pedagogical focus on a particular topic, concept or complex skill rather than a particular unit of time.

The study proceeds through cycles of planning, teaching and evidence-based discussion.

In each cycle, a collaboratively planned lesson is taught by a different teacher while the other teachers collect observational data, which is then discussed in a post-lesson conference as a basis for moving into the next cycle of planning a revised lesson, teaching and discussion.

Post-lesson interviews with individual pupils or a focus group about their learning experiences at the end of each cycle may be conducted by one of the teachers or an external facilitator.

The teaching team may be facilitated by an expert (knowledgeable other) who specialises in the curriculum area concerned.

The findings of the study are rendered open to discussion with professional peers, e.g. via a full-text report or research poster.

The viability of the UEA module therefore depended on:

- the recruitment of school-based teams (ideally 3–4 teachers) from a particular subject area, or engaged in teaching cross-curricular content in common; or
- the recruitment of individual teachers who are in a position to recruit and lead a Lesson Study group in their school.

### **Core ideas about the theory and practice of Lesson Study**

Lesson study in Japan is typically atheoretical in the sense that it is not informed by an explicit pedagogical theory. It operates as a practical tradition

of elementary education that is 100 years old. This tradition tacitly embodies and sustains a child-centred pedagogical perspective that stems from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, in a context of globalisation, it could be argued that Lesson Study needs to be informed by an explicit evidence-based pedagogical theory.

In Hong Kong, Lo Mun Ling and her co-workers at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Lo, 2012) blended Lesson Study with a pedagogical Theory of Variation, which was developed on the basis of phenomenographic research in Sweden by Ference Marton and Shirley Booth (1997). Variation Theory provided teachers engaged in Lesson Study with a pedagogical tool for developing innovative teaching strategies aimed at ‘learning with understanding’. This kind of theory-informed Lesson Study focused teachers’ attention on the quality of their pupils’ learning experiences and became known as Learning Study (Lo and Marton, 2011). I felt that it was this theory-informed approach to Lesson Study that the course should aspire to facilitate in schools. In this respect, I agreed with Lo Mun Ling that there was a need for teachers to focus on the quality of pupils’ learning experiences in their lessons rather than on the instrumental effectiveness of their teaching methods in securing good test results. The latter has been increasingly advocated by the globalisation of curriculum reforms that view curriculum goals as pre-specifications of measurable learning outcomes, rather than values and principles that govern a worthwhile teaching-learning process. Lo Mun Ling argued that Variation Theory enabled teachers as researchers to focus on the quality of pupils’ learning experiences as evidenced in their interactions with their teacher and peers.

Early in the module, following an account of the Japanese Lesson Study process, Variation Theory would be introduced to give teachers a possible guide to data gathering and a language for talking together about pupils’ experiences as learners in their classrooms and how these might be enhanced and improved. Variation Theory highlights pedagogically significant aspects of pupils’ experience as learners in the following terms:

It focuses teachers’ attention on students’ and teachers’ various understandings of the object of learning and how they change and develop over time.

The object of learning depicts the subject content to be learned, but it does not describe how this subject matter is to be handled by the teacher.

An object of learning may have both a specific and general aspect. This will involve the development of both specific subject knowledge and those general capabilities involved in putting that knowledge to practical use in the contexts of everyday life and work. Deepening understanding of an object of learning will involve pupils in discerning both its specific and general aspects. Hence, discerning the specific aspects of an object of learning and the cultivation of generic higher order thinking skills are not independent processes. They are closely related to each other and cannot be taught in isolation.