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# Professional Learning Community (PLC): Lesson Study as Learning for Teachers

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*Abstract: Professional Learning Community (PLC) has become one of the agenda in the continuous professional development for teachers. PLC has its own benefits and impact in teaching and learning processes. As learning occurs in both teaching and learning, PLC plays its role to manoeuvre and boost the processes. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Lesson Study (LS) as one of the collaborative tool in PLC can help teachers to learn about students' learning via teaching collaboratively and LS as a learning tool for teachers. LS is considered as an approach for teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) for optimal learning to occur. Before the teaching to come into action, the thinking system of the teacher is important to consider. Learning can only happen when teachers give more attention to students' focus, behaviour and feedback. Ability for teachers to identify and rectify students' learning problem can be done by practicing LS. LS is where a group of teachers work collaboratively with shared objective towards students' learning. LS enable teachers to discuss and share students' learning processes including looking into students' learning difficulties. Teachers will be able to share their ideas, skills and even gives suggestions during the reflection session. Reflection in LS is the most precious session where teachers will bring about all possible ideas and actions to realize students' learning at the optimum. LS also provide the best platform for teachers to learn from each other as well as from own's weaknesses.*

**Keywords:** Collaborative, Learning Organization, Reflection, Student Learning, Thinking System.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

PLC has been very synonym for many teachers who care to know how their students learn as a result of their teaching collaboratively. PLC allows teachers to enjoy working with others for the same objectives. This will create a constructive teaching and learning processes. Teachers will always find the best way to ensure students learning to occur and no students will be left behind. Therefore, according to [5] PLC is defined as a group of teachers who consistently work collaboratively and systematically to achieve the shared mission in

students' learning. According to [4], quality of education can be improved directly through improving the quality of teaching in the classroom. Continuous professional development (CPD) has widely been done towards realizing the improvements. Nevertheless, less research conducted to study the impact of CPDs towards students' learning outcomes which is central to realize quality education. Lesson Study was pronounced as an authentic and strategic CPD towards successful PLC and best practice in managing teachers' professional improvement.

### **1.1 Teachers' Thinking Process**

In realizing PLC in teaching and learning, it is worthy to study and give close look to the teacher's thinking. How does teacher's thinking can influence practices? What are the factors contribute the thinking system of teachers? How teachers' thinking formulated? With reference to [3] outlined how teachers think, act and react determine effective teaching. They also identified two main important domains that involves the teaching process namely the teachers' thought processes and teachers' actions and their observable effects (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, it is very important to ensure the thought process, actions and observable effects align with the objectives of teaching and students learning. Who is responsible to confirm teachers' thought process is not derail from the desired teaching and learning objectives? Cultivation of PLC amongst teachers is seen to be able to justify teachers' thought process and actions accordingly. It is believed that teacher behaviour affects student behaviour, which in turn affects student behaviour and ultimately student achievement [2]. This discovery revealed the importance for teachers' thought process to go through constructive experience in teaching and learning. [1] discovered that life experience contributed to teachers' beliefs and actions. Both teachers' thought process and actions need to be highly considered in preparing teachers at all levels. Teacher education provider must take significant measures in all aspects to ensure teachers' thought process and actions will finally contribute to positive teaching and learning. Continuous professional development (CPD) providers must take into consideration both domains when designing and planning courses for teachers to attend. [1] also suggested that the process of learning at the earliest stage (preschool level) must be scrutinized by time as more new elements contribute to the learning process. The advancement of present technology is one of the elements to be highly considered in terms of its application and security. The elements of technology shouldn't be the hindrance to the advancement of teaching and learning amongst teachers and students at large. Therefore, it has to be handled with high caution as the future education is highly depending and associated with technology in use.

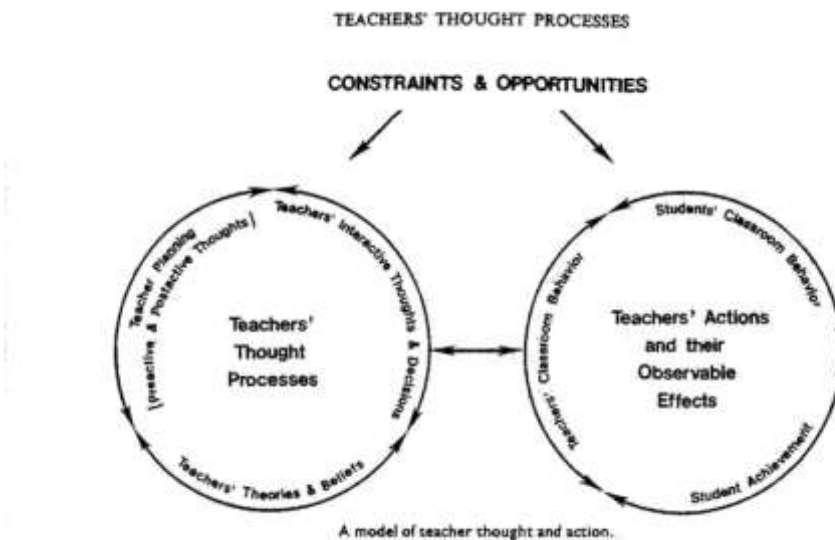


Figure 1: Teachers' Thought Process

Source: In Wittrock. M. C. Handbook of research on teaching. New York: McMillan Publication Co.

### 1.1.1 Lesson Study (LS): A Learning Tool for Teachers

LS is known as one of the tool or devices in realizing PLC used by teachers. It is a cyclical process which involve basically five steps namely i. deciding objectives or purposes for particular lesson, ii. plan the lesson, iii. put the lesson plan in action, iv. evaluate the lesson plan in action and v. do revision with lesson plan and decide whether to amend the lesson plan or the lesson delivery. In addition, between step iii and iv, a subject matter expert (SME) involvement is highly recommended. The role of SME is very vital in terms of the content of the subject as well as the pedagogical. Some authors called this SME as a knowledgeable other and they are the same person playing the same role in the practice of LS.

The first step is crucial to some extent when teachers have to identify the learning problems and make decision upon the identified learning problem. Learning problem identification required discussions and merely close observations by the respective teachers before making final decision about the learning problem. Basically, teachers will realize the learning problem by doing observation during the teaching and learning process. Sometimes the learning problems discussed amongst the teachers were very informal where it might take place anywhere.

All teachers involve were given equal opportunities to give ideas and suggestion on how to carry out the lesson focusing on the specific learning problems. Not only teachers be bale discuss but deciding which and what learning problem creates learning amongst teachers where teachers respect and accept ideas from others [7]. Without realizing a constructive discussion and working collaboratively occurs along the process. Deciding what activity to include in the development of the lesson plan is another crucial part. Teachers need to be more creative and deeper dive the identified learning problems. "Two heads are better than one" where more ideas to come into during the discussion. Planning the lesson plan requires

respective teachers to contribute opinion and ideas to realize the lesson into actions. They are fully accountable and responsible for the lesson plan including whatever outcome of the lesson plan when it takes place. The sense of responsibility and accountability are very healthy and reflect positive working environment for teachers and finally towards meaningful learning. The execution of the lesson plan will enable peer teachers to look closely to the students' learning. This prolific process will enable teachers to identify the strength and weaknesses of the lesson plan as well as the activities that had been planned and designed. Most importantly is the effort worthy the learning problem. The teacher who is teaching might not be able to give full attention to every single student during the lesson. However, peer teachers can play their role closely monitoring and observing the students' learning process. These close observations will enable teacher observer to notice how students' learning occur and how students react towards the planned lesson.

The third steps occur right after the teaching completed. All participative teachers, observers and knowledgeable others will gather and hold a reflection session. This is the moment where precious feedback gathered and learning occurs for all. Serendipity often reported during the lesson. For example, the learning activities designed did not reach all students and even simplest activity might not be able to be comprehended by some of the students. Therefore, the sharing session during the reflection normally will be very fruitful and open for improvement. Summary by the appointed knowledgeable others also provide learning for participative teachers. The reflection session is very inspiring and rich description and narratives revealed. The central issue or the heart of the discussion were on students' learning as a result of the teacher's teaching activity. It will be during this time where a strong collaboration and understanding amongst teachers will be reflected. Having said the idea of respect and trust, LS will flock teachers together as a team working for solving students' learning. Experiential learning occurs for teachers at all positions and learning from each other without hesitate to accept critics and comments. LS allows teachers to welcome them with wisdom. Love and passion towards students' learning and teaching strengthen the teachers believe, and attitude towards the realm of teaching and learning.

Participative teachers will decide whether to improve or redo the teaching and the lesson plan taking into consideration all feedbacks from all participative teachers and knowledgeable others. The process will be repeated until all participative teachers find students learning at the optimum. Fig. 2 exhibits the process of LS. Please note at step 3 and 4, the knowledgeable others play his role.

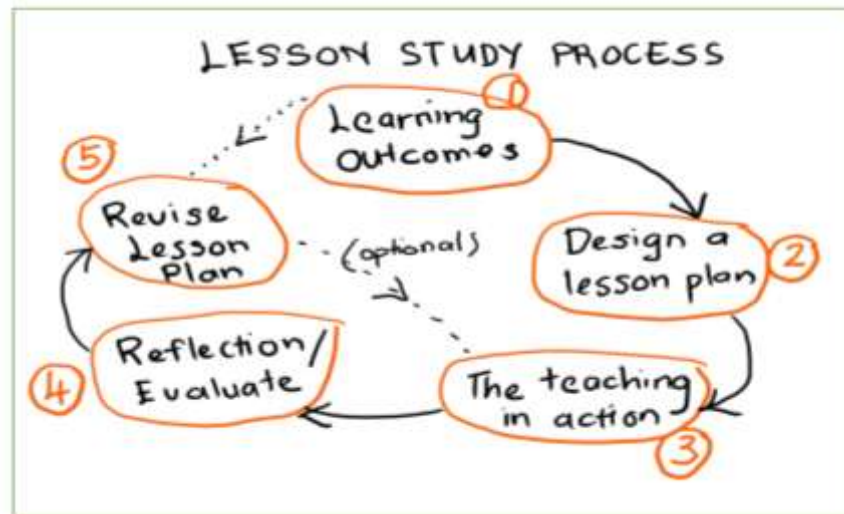


Figure 2: Lesson Study Process

### Lesson Study in Selected Schools in Malaysia.

Research by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) on LS practice in Malaysia indicated a high level for both public schools and teacher education institutes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020). Supporting the findings were few researches conducted by [6]. For the purpose of this paper the focus is to the practice of LS in selected school under the supervision of State Religious Department (SRD) in one of the states in Malaysia. It was in 2019 when the first initiative took place to introduce PLC and LS was chosen as an approach to all teachers under the supervision of the selected SRD. Commencing with series of continuous professional development for SRD teachers continuously specifically on PLC and LS. In 2021, the respective group of 11 members in charge of the continuous professional development namely Special Interest Group – Learning Organization (SIG-LO) moved to another step forward to practice LS for SRD schools. A series of coaching and mentoring sessions were conducted. It was realized that the primary step was to create awareness amongst the SRD officers about LS and its returns towards students' performance. School leaders are accountable to realizing this effort. PLC particularly LS promotes flexibility and choice for teachers. These features provide opportunity for teachers to design and LS meets these desiderata. It was a very precious experiences for the teachers, SIG-LO team members and the organizations in realizing LS. It was a very challenging task to break the "old school thinking" of teachers in relation to teaching and learning. LS is considered very new and yet to be tested for its authenticity. A three-day coaching and mentoring were conducted every month for three months before LS took place to educate teachers about LS and its returns for students' learning. Since those teachers required high supervision, triple effort was given to them as they were not trained teachers. Some of these teachers were having minimal academic qualification and to an extreme end, there were teachers with post degree qualification. LS was planned and designed by the teachers and were conducted as scheduled. All the LSs were seriously handled by the teachers and observers were consistently provide support and motivation. There were school that were away and timely to reach but the LS spirit and courage has put no limit to realize LS. All LS were focusing on the students' learning problems.

The findings of the LS were very meaningful and most important as it was an eye opener for respective authorities. It was taken very positively by all teachers and the administration of SRD. In extension to LS, a special learning and exposure session was conducted for teacher inspectorate towards LS. Even though a session was very insufficient but it was better than nothing at all and good for initial stage towards cultivation LS. It was a meaningful and mindful learning for school inspectorates.

Without doubts SRD allocated some amount of allocation for the respective teachers and SIG-LO team members to participate in the World Association of Lesson Study 2022 located at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia - WAL2022 (Fig. 3). Five LS research papers were presented by the teachers and a symposium paper presented by SIG-LO. WAL is a well-established and known world widely for its movement and efforts in LS. Being able to participate as presenters in WAL2022 is the highest accomplishment of SRD teachers and the administration. Above all this achievement has proven that teachers under the supervision of the selected SRD are capable to become good teachers and promote students learning with meaning. LS has given them more ideas to enhance their teaching practices and also create meaningful learning for the students. It was observed how the teachers struggled and sacrificed their time and effort to realize LS without fail. As for the SIG-LO team members, they never stop from giving the teachers confident and motivation in their teaching and learning activities. Invaluable inputs from the team members have encouraged the teachers to believe that they are equally good as compare to the well-trained teachers.



Figure 3: Colours of WAL2022

## 2. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, LS is a tool or an approach that can flock teachers to work collaboratively and learn from each other. LS promote active learning for teachers and also promote creative thinking by identifying students' learning problems and find the best way of minimizing the learning problem to take place. Pertaining to the learning problem, teachers need to learn to understand the root of each learning problem. This can be done through LS. LS should be

made as a culture among teachers and supported by the educational leaders. Research has revealed that support from top leaders will alleviate the practice of LS and simultaneously enculturate LS at school. Not until LS put into practice, teachers can never be able to appreciate the benefits of LS can bring in promoting students' learning. To ensure learning to occur accordingly, teachers need to equip themselves with latest knowledge and skills. Notwithstanding, knowledge and skill about technology in use is highly beneficial. The ability to make meaning with the usage of technology is no compromised. Technology in education and student learning is relevant and teachers need to keep abreast with the development. LS in action can help teachers not to fall far behind in applying latest knowledge and skill in teaching and learning. The process of LS provides opportunity for teachers to learn from each other as well as the presence of the knowledgeable others. In terms of financial, minimum or no financial required to practice LS. Teachers should benefit LS for this reason and never let people from outside the organization to instruct them what is best for their students. LS will provide all information teachers need to promote students' learning. Learning organization promoted in LS is where the aspect of working collaboratively and learning from each other emphasized. Teachers who are having the thinking of LS as culture will simultaneously put learning organization as culture. Both LS and learning organization should be realized and be a culture at all learning institutions. The management and administration support in terms of understanding, awareness and financial were identified as desiderata in realizing LS as an approach for professional learning community for teachers.

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