

Book review – Changing teaching, changing teachers: 21st century teaching and learning through lesson and learning study

Changing teaching, changing teachers: 21st century teaching and learning through lesson and learning study

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This book is a recent addition to the World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS)–Routledge Lesson Study book series and a great contribution to the growing lesson and learning studies scholarship. The book is designed for educational researchers, teacher educators, lesson study facilitators and coaches, and teachers. The book proves to be an important resource for all stakeholders that aim to engage in transformative practices (Mezirow, 1997) through lesson and learning studies. Relatedly, the book is based on a large-scale research project on 21st Century Teaching and Learning (21CTL) in Brunei, and how lesson study acted as a catalyst of change for teachers who gained insight into their own experience of (professional) learning as well as that of their students.

Conceptualizing 21st century teaching as a mode of education through which learners “collaborate, construct interdisciplinary knowledge, take responsibility for their own learning, solve real-world problems, and innovate” (Wood and Sithamparam, 2021, p. ix), the authors argued that teachers need to engage in action research (i.e. lesson study) to make sure that their students achieve such outcomes. That contemporary role of educators makes them adopt the critical role as the *agents of change* (Watson, 2014) and makes them participate in various practitioner inquiries such as lesson and/or learning study. The authors of this book discuss that “the soul of lesson study” (2021, p. 26) is to present professional learning opportunities for teachers so that they can be empowered to make decisions regarding their own classroom practices. This way, they can raise an understanding of their learners’ needs and critical aspects of (the objects of) learning. Crucially, the authors oppose the conventional top-down approaches to teacher professional development in which experts present certain *best practices* and tell teachers what they should teach and how they should teach it.

In chapter 1, the authors zero in on learning outcome of *changing as person*; they argue that when learners develop new perspectives, they start seeing the world differently and *change* as a person. In tandem with this argument, the authors present evidence of how teachers transform their beliefs and practices after gaining insight into their students’ learning experiences. Accordingly, they elaborate on explicit cases by which how teachers become the agents of change as the result of the change in their views about teaching. Grounded on the theoretical underpinning in the first chapter and evidence from the previous research, the authors review the lesson study variations in chapter 2, and they compare and contrast these contextual variations in relation to the conventional Japanese lesson study structure. In chapter 3, the authors introduce learning study that is based on the variation theory of



learning. They suggest that students can experience varied ways of experiencing the object of learning with the tools provided by the variation theory. Chapter 4 focuses on the 21st century teaching and learning design. In this chapter, the authors provide learning activity rubrics to specify different dimensions of 21st century learning design and to make sure that these dimensions (i.e. collaboration, knowledge construction, information-communication technology, real-world problem-solving, self-regulation and skilled communication) are covered in the lessons that were devised as the sample lessons of the lesson study action research in the project 21CTL. Chapter 5 and 6 provide a detailed walkthrough for the readers to see the 21CTL project in action by providing detailed information about the lesson study cycles. In chapter 6, though, the authors provide a critical account of the lesson study action research as well. For example, they concentrate on identifying the critical aspects of the object of learning such as different dimensions of the Japanese occupation (a piece of the secondary social studies curriculum content in Brunei). In chapter 7, the authors report on the roles of different stakeholders in lesson study such as those of teachers', researchers', facilitators' and/or coaches'. They also invite all those stakeholders to understand their roles in fostering the critical aspects regarding the object of learning in lesson study. In the eighth chapter, which is the last one, the authors reflect on the 21CTL project by questioning critically what conditions it takes to change *teaching* and change *teachers* in light of their experience in the 21CTL project.

Overall, the book presents a theoretical underpinning of how teacher learning needs to be transformed in tandem with 21st century education and exemplifies it with a concrete example from Brunei. They argue that the increasingly varied instructional conditions in our day and age require teachers to adopt the roles of both the agents *of* change (as in changing teaching) and the agents *that* change (as in changing teachers).

Being a language teacher and a teacher educator myself, I appreciate this book as it helps me reflect on my identity as a teacher–researcher. My responsibility as an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher, who also engages actively in doing research, includes making sure that my research engagements are situated in my practice, and in a way, creating a *teaching-research nexus* (Mckinley, 2019). Taking the critical issues surrounding EFL classes into account, action research is one way for me to create this nexus successfully. Being a form of practitioner-led and participatory action research, lesson study requires me (as a member of lesson study groups) to gain a reflexive understanding of myself as an educator, the context of my teaching practice, my students and the object(s) of learning.

That said, the content of this book contribute to me in three ways, First of all, the detailed presentation of the 21CTL project in this book provides a blueprint for me on how I could level up my lesson study practice. Ample cases demonstrating teachers' experiences provide relatable insight. Second, this book is beneficial for me to grow not only as a teacher–learner but also as a lesson study facilitator because it also presents the lesson study put into practice in the 21CTL project by connecting it to a theoretical discussion of the lesson and learning studies in the background. The thick description of the project may help those who have similar intentions build up a culture of research-informed teaching and teacher learning/development practices in transferable contexts. Finally, I particularly appreciate the explicit discussion of how teachers engage in critical aspects of their objects of learning throughout lesson study. Such an engagement has become a paramount necessity in our day and age. On one hand, there is a rising conversation about issues about diversity, equity and inclusion in the classroom; on the other hand, teachers find themselves experiencing tensions raised by sociopolitical issues such as refugees education, inequitable assessment practices or resurgent populism, which have a great impact on teachers' everyday practices.

As a reader of this book, I would also suggest some improvements (hopefully) in the new editions to come. There is a clear connection drawn between action research and

lesson study; however, I expected to hear more about the impact the lesson study teachers created in their micro-level of teaching practice (i.e. in their classrooms) and whether and how this impact resonated in the wider contexts of meso and macro levels of educational practices and policy. Such an ecological discussion (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016) might provide further evidence of how lesson study transformed action researchers/teachers into agents of change.

All in all, my experience as a reader of this book helped me transform my lesson study *practice* into a lesson study *praxis*; it was very beneficial to read about how the theory of lesson and learning studies as well as teacher learning in the 21st century was put in practice in the 21CTL project. In a way, Wood and Sithamparam's clear theoretical discussion of lesson study helped me understand the contextual dynamics of the 21CTL project, and the project helped me to understand lesson study in a situated way. Briefly, this book presents an accord of theory and practice of teaching and teacher learning in the 21st century through lesson study.

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