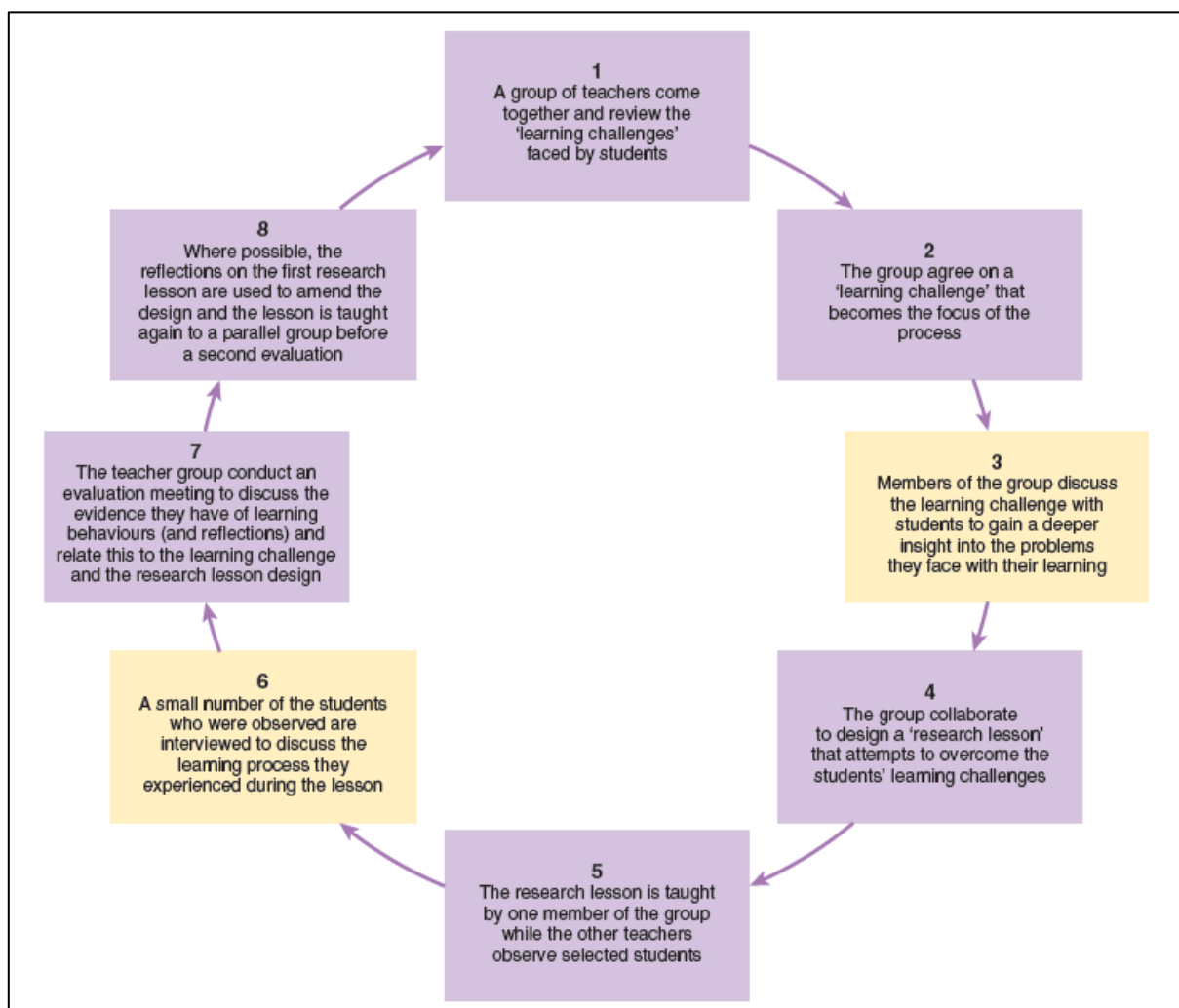


What is lesson study?

Lesson study is a form of collaborative teacher enquiry. It seeks to deepen understanding of learning as a way of developing classroom practice by using a plan, do, review structure. The important feature of lesson study is the focus on learners rather than the teacher. It involves a group of teachers agreeing a specific element of geographical learning to focus on. They design a 'research' lesson collaboratively that is taught by one teacher while the rest observe the learning of selected students. After the lesson these students are interviewed about their learning. The teachers discuss the lesson and the student learning and after reviewing the evidence together they adapt the lesson. The revised lesson is taught again in a second cycle. The diagram from Wood and Rawlings Smith (2017) illustrates the lesson study cycle.



Lesson study can take different forms in ITE and induction. It can adopt the mentor as expert and mentee format. Here the experienced practitioner leads the process initially, with the trainee engaged as co-planner and observer. But it also can be set up for a small group of new teachers to work collaboratively as peers, possibly with a mentor/tutor. This approach is an excellent opportunity to carry out a mini-research project to explore an aspect of students' geographical

learning that is challenging to teach. By pooling their expertise, the new teachers gain insights into the complexity of planning to improve student learning. Whatever the approach, the task gives them the opportunity to engage in genuine discussion about pedagogy, geography and student learning. Bell (2020) uses lesson study to build a 'habit of inquiry' into her geography ITE training which she believes will instill good habits they will continue with into their later careers.

The geography focus should be decided by the group, based on their experience and/or reading. The intention should be to seek ways to overcome the learning challenge identified as they jointly plan the lesson. While planning they should discuss how they anticipate the students might respond.

Bell (2020) describes an approach where one of the group takes on the role of 'expert' in the specific subject content and pedagogical content knowledge that is to be explored. They carry out a literature review to develop subject expertise. They pose questions to test the group's assumptions as they plan the lesson – alternatively the mentor takes this role.

Once the 'research' lesson is planned, it is taught by one of the group while the rest observe. In order to obtain some in-depth qualitative data the teachers focus their observation on specific learners and carefully position themselves to best observe what the learners are saying and doing. After the lesson they talk with these students to gather information about their learning experiences. All this evidence should provide in-depth information about these students' learning, although it may be conflicting, as Wood and Rawlings Smith (2017) note: *'it can happen that, students' recalled experience is very different to what teachers believe they had observed'*. A useful refinement to improve the data gathering is for teachers to discuss the topic with the selected students in advance of the lesson to identify their prior learning.

The teachers discuss all the evidence collected to evaluate how well the students understood the learning, and how effective the lesson plan and implementation had been in achieving its goals. They consider how the lesson and learning activities should be improved, and teach it again to a parallel group. In the expert/novice format followed by Bell (2020), the first lesson is taught by the expert, and the novice teaches the second.

Carrick and Edwards (2020) also used a lesson study approach for their action research cycle to explore three different approaches to independent research with Year 13 groups studying Globalisation and Global Governance. They found it valuable for informing them about the most appropriate content and structure for their curriculum and plan to use this action research process more widely.

Lesson study offers some genuine action-research for new teachers to embark on in a practical classroom context. It allows them to apply theory to practice. It provides a way to engage them in deeper exploration of how pedagogy and curriculum influence student learning than is often found in ITT or ECT training. The collaborative dimension to lesson study is important gives new teachers opportunities to pool ideas, share knowledge and practice, and analyse outcomes together which brings new insights about students' geographical learning. With several observers the group allows them to see things they could not otherwise see and capture insights through multiple perspectives. It introduces how research can take place in the classroom context.

Research into lesson study in a geography ITE context has been very positive. Wood and Rawlings Smith (2017) found that lesson study had provided *'opportunity to find time to engage in genuine and critical debate about pedagogy, subject content and student learning and have a sustained positive impact on classroom practice and curriculum development'*. Lofthouse and Cowie (2018) use an adapted lesson study approach to develop a repertoire for teaching thinking skills in a PGCE module. They concluded it can play a major part in a teacher's development in that *'Lesson study can have a profound effect on how student teachers see themselves as classroom practitioners and how they move forward. It can change their idea of themselves and move them from technician/apprentice to professional.'*

Sherrington (2013) also reports very positively on the practical use of lesson study in a science teaching context. He writes: *We all gained from the process and felt it had been interesting, worthwhile and rewarding. It is no exaggeration to say that, for me, it is one of the most interesting CPD activities I've ever done. I can see this becoming a popular teacher-driven activity that is highly cost-effective.*

Reading and References

- Bell, A. 'Lesson study as an effective process to develop evidence-informed teaching practice of trainee and early career geography teachers', *Impact (Chartered College of Teaching)*, May 2020
- Carrick, M. and Edwards, S. 'How can independent research promote critical thinking skills in A level geography lessons?', *Teaching Geography*, Autumn 2020
- Lofthouse, R. and Cowie, K. 'Joining the dots: Using lesson study to develop metacognitive teaching' *Impact (Chartered College of Teaching)*, May 2018
- Lofthouse, R., McElwee, S., King, C., Lofthouse, C. (2017) '[Lesson Study: an opportunity for collaborative teacher inquiry](#)', in *Teachers and Teacher Educators Learning Through Inquiry: International Perspectives*, The Jan Kochanowski University, Kielce, Poland, pp. 63-80.
- Sherrington, T. (2013) '[Getting Started with Lesson Study](#)', Teacherhead blog
- Wood, P. and Rawlings Smith, E. (2017) 'Lesson study: A collaborative approach to teacher growth', *Geography*, Summer 2017

A Cautionary Footnote

The Education Endowment Foundation (2017) undertook an evaluation of a trial which included Lesson Study and concluded, '*The project found no evidence that this version of Lesson Study improves maths and reading attainment at KS2*'.

David Weston of The Teacher Development Trust (2017) responded to this and concluded that '*When testing a transmission mechanism, the type of content being used matters a lot – not just the quality in itself but also whether that content is suited to the transmission mechanism*' and in this case he comments '*we can either say that the pedagogical content is either wholly untested or it is a mix of already-shown-to-be-non-significant plus some untested content.*'

You can follow up this exchange in the references below.

The comments made in this paper about *Lesson Study*, refer to secondary geographical learning with a focus on developing new teachers' understanding and practice. This is a very different animal. It is not valid to apply the EEF conclusions to this totally different context. The findings about the value of using lesson study in the geography ITE cannot be dismissed because of it.

- Murphy, R., Weinhardt, F., Wyness, G. et al. 2017 Lesson Study Evaluation Report and Executive Summary. Education Endowment Foundation, London.
- Weston, D. (2017) Does Lesson Study Work? Teacher Development Trust. Available at: tdtrust.org/lesson-study-work-look-new-eef-trial (accessed 27 April 2020).

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