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Learning study: a Case Study of Teaching “Expressive Drawing” in Visual Arts

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Abstract
This paper presents a case study of how four teachers in one school adopted Learning Study in teaching Visual Arts in Hong Kong. The teachers found that the students at the primary level had difficulties expressing feelings through shapes. In 2003, they used the Learning Study approach to analyze teaching of this difficult topic. Each teacher taught the lesson and observed the lesson of the other three. A discussion, using student feedback, was held immediately after each lesson, aimed at improving the next one. A post-test was conducted to discover what students had learned. The result was good yet there were still many problems. In 2004, the same teachers taught the same topic with revision based on the outcomes of their previous lessons. There was more focus on using artists’ artworks and students’ expression of human figures. This paper will analyze materials and interviews from the Learning Studies to look at how to improve teachers’ teaching of drawing.

Introduction
“Learning Study” is a way that through collaboration with peers and research in their own teaching to enhance teachers’ professionalism. To face the changing of Education Reform in Hong Kong, the role of teacher has changed from that of one who ‘transmits knowledge’ to that of one who ‘inspires students to construct knowledge’, from that of one who ‘implements a curriculum’ to that of one who ‘participates in the development of a school-based curriculum’ (Education Commission, 2000). Moon (2000) points out teaching is more demanding today than ever before. Many teachers recognize that the skills they developed in the past are no longer sufficient to meet their students’ diverse needs (p.107) “Teaching Expressive Drawing” project was one of the Progressive and Innovative Primary Schools (PIPS) projects that initiated by the Centre for the Development of School Partnership and Field Experience (CDSPFE) of The Hong Kong Institute
of Education in 2003. Four teachers who taught Visual Arts in one school raise the problems that the primary level four students (age 9) had difficulties expressing feelings in their drawings through “exaggerative shapes”. As children’s drawing is an important teaching content in primary schools. It was a good topic to explore the methods to improve teachers in planning an effective lesson. This paper reports on the case that teachers using “Learning Study” to do that.

**Theoretical Framework**

*“Learning Study” and Action Research*

Lewis (2002) describes Lesson Study is the major form of professional development chosen by Japanese teachers. It is a cycle in which teachers work together to consider their long-term goals for their students, bring those goals to life in actual “research lessons”, and collaborate in observing, discussing, and refining the lessons. (p.1) In Hong Kong, we refer to Lesson Study as “Learning Study”. The focus is on what the students learn in one lesson. It has its own theory in the nature of learning by Ference Marton (1997). So do the Japanese Lesson Studies, the big difference is the theoretical base with the Hong Kong Learning Study being based on “The Theory of Variation.” “Learning Study” employs an action research methodology, first developed by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin. “Action research is a cyclical process that involves identifying a general idea or problem, gathering related information, developing an action plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the results, and starting over with a revised idea or problem.” (McKay, 1992, p.29) Elliott (1991) claims that action research integrates teaching and teacher development, curriculum development and evaluation, research and philosophical reflection, into a unified conception of a reflective educational practice. (p.54) Therefore, the idea in “Learning Study” is more or less the same as action research, it emphasized on teachers’ planning, implementing and reflection and how students’ learn.

*“Learning Study” and teachers’ professional development*

Professional development is to help teachers keep the up to date with new and effective practices in teaching and learning. Mouza (2003) points out traditional sit-and-get training sessions without follow-up support seems not so effective. As he quotes Fullan’s ideas that many professional development efforts are failure because the development of activities away from the school site, the irrelevance of activities to teacher classroom practices, conducting one-shot workshops without follow-up support, and the inability to address the individual needs and concerns of the teachers. He also reiterates Lewis ideas that effective professional development is organized around real problems of practice, provides access to outside resources and expertise, draws support from the community. (p.273) As in the “Learning Study”, peer coaching places as important way. “Learning Study” approach tries to provide teachers with an environment that develops the team spirit through engaging in the working process.
**“Learning Study” and teaching children’s expressive drawing**

Parsons (1987) stresses the point that art is often thought to have something to do with the emotions. Parsons mentions the four stages of children’s understanding of the expressiveness of paintings: stage 1 does not distinguish between the expressiveness of a painting with the feelings of the child; stage 2 focuses on the clues gained from the people or animals depicted, such as in facial expressions, gestures and actions. Stages 3 constructs the expressiveness by empathizing with persons depicted, or with the artist, and looks for an emotion or an idea that may be directly felt by the viewer. Stage 4 additionally looks at the “details of the material” and the history of the artwork, which include consideration of the elements of the medium (the colours, lines, shapes, and forms) and the style. (p.59-85). This means that teaching children to create or appreciate expressive artworks through the learning of visual language is very important. Wilson (1987) claims that “drawing has an important place in schools because of its contribution to students’ cognitive processes, to their competence and skill in the use of a valuable symbol system. School drawing should promote the acquisition of knowledge and understanding through a special visual means pervaded with feeling and aesthetic qualities.” (pp.10-11) The principal concern of this “Learning Study” is with how to produce an effective art lesson in schools.

**Methods and data sources**

**Research Questions**

The “Teaching Children’s Drawing” project included four teachers who taught Visual Arts in the same school. Their teaching experiences ranged from 4 years to over 30 years. Institute academic staff, Institute Teacher Development Consultant (TDC) were participated through the whole project and provided subject and research knowledge supports. The school principal and school visual arts panel helped to restructure the timetable and arranged the regular meeting time, venue and IT manpower support. The Quality Education Fund (QEF) via the Institute’s Progressive and Innovative Primary Schools (PIPS) Project contributed $50,000 for employing the teaching assistant to report the project progress and the professional video shooting team to take the videos through meetings, interviews and lectures. In addition, one teacher attended an intensive course on Learning Study held at The Hong Kong Institute of Education for a period of one month. In this paper, I try to investigate three questions relevant to teacher learning:

1. How did the “Learning Study” enhance teacher professional development?
2. How did teachers learn to teach children’s drawing from this project?
3. How did the “Learning study” improve the teaching and learning of Visual Arts in schools?

**Research Methods**

Qualitative research addresses the questions directed toward a deeper understanding of social phenomena. This study is a case study, it aims to find out teachers’ professional development
through the implementation of the “Learning Study” in primary school. Cohen & Manion (1992) clearly describes that the case study is the researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs (p.124-125). In this study, I examine four teachers in one school from their planning, implementation and evaluation of the “children’s drawing” project in 2003-4. The whole project lasted for two years. Triangulate significant data gathered included interviews, video recording, classroom observation and artifact collection aimed to have in-depth analyses.

Planning the lesson

The following tables illustrate the main discussion points and the actions have been taken.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Discussion/ Reflection</th>
<th>Action taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teachers raise the children’s learning problems: “drawing the pictures expressively”, especially the children do not familiar to know how to use “exaggerative” shapes to illustrate the characters.</td>
<td>How can the teachers know the children’s learning problems?</td>
<td>Use “pre-test” to find out how children’s use “shape” in drawings. A worksheet on three objects has been designed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>TDC (Teacher Development Consultant) explain the theory of “Learning Study”.</td>
<td>One teacher has attended the “Learning Study” course and lead the other three teachers to discuss the “object of learning” and “critical features” in the lesson.</td>
<td>“Motivation” in the lesson is very important in teaching art. Teachers decide to use “leather puppet show” to create stories. In order to let teachers know how to manage the “leather puppet show”, the school head invites the artist to conduct a workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sharing artists’ artworks in the meetings</td>
<td>Teach children “expressive drawing” through shapes is the main theme. To stimulate children’s thinking, artworks, videos are necessary. <strong>Object of learning:</strong> draw the</td>
<td>Teachers try to find out the photos, different artists’ expressive drawings, such as Picasso’s Guenina, Munch’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Object of learning:** draw the
Lesson 1: Teacher A (14/7/2003)

**Pre-conference**
Teacher explains the teaching steps of the whole lesson. “What do the students learn” is the important point.

**Classroom observation**
The artworks seem too many, teaching time is not enough. The children can’t remember the puppet show story because the long holiday. Use sign pen to draw on the plastic paper is fine but most of the children copy the original background and cannot manage to change the shapes.

**Interview with children**
Children understand lines can create shapes and they prefer to use curve lines to represent the terrible feelings. They also reflected that to draw the shape smaller and represent “afraid”.

**Post conference with teachers**
Too many electronic equipments involved: computer, projector, visualizer, video, teacher reflected that she looked nervous. Try to use “pause” button if the teacher wants to explain the artwork in more detail.
The timing for doing the worksheet can be shorter.
The color pictures will make confuse with the shapes, it is suggested to change the color picture to “black and white”.
Not to put the plastic paper on the original background to avoid copying.

Lesson 2: Teacher B (15/7/2003)

**Pre-conference**
Teacher explains the teaching procedure and make amendments on the last lesson.

**Classroom observation**
The role play of the “puppet show” is good. Children are deeply involved. The time control is good and the rundown is more fluently than the last lesson.

**Interview with children**
Children interest in Munch’s artwork but still interest to use facial expression on the shape. They still get impression in line more than shape.
A similar format was used for lessons 3 and 4, each time the lesson was taught, the teachers became more aware of the need to focus the curriculum directly on the object of learning and to omit additional and confusing material. In the last sharing session, teachers were felt excited. As one teacher said, “the experience of doing the lesson study gives me excitement because I have opportunities to observe other teachers’ lessons. I am happy because my colleagues praise my good performance, and also, colleagues give me opinions to improve my teaching.” But still, there will be many space for improvement, especially how to choose appropriate “object of learning” and “learning content” in one lesson.

**Cycle two**

In March, 2003, two Grade 4 teachers tried out the cycle two “Learning Study” lesson choosing “Animals” as the theme. Some children could draw the animals expressively if they had already had experience of observing animals. However, those children who did not have such experience could only copy from books. The teachers reflected that the theme they chose would be bound to influence the children’s products, so they used the theme “Human Figures” in cycle three.

**Cycle three**

In cycle three, only one teacher tried out the theme “Human Figures – my feelings”, in November, 2004. In the pre-test, the teachers asked the children to produce four drawings of different emotions on the worksheet: I feel happy, I feel angry, I feel sad and I feel frightened. A total of 38 children took part in the pre-test. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change the shape</th>
<th>Facial expression</th>
<th>Comic Symbol</th>
<th>Story Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers used two activities employing the ‘the theory of variation’ in their teaching. These variations were role-play and using the works of other artists.
1. **Role-play**: Four children were asked to come to the front of the class and pretend to be experiencing different emotions, while the others observed the differences among them.

2. **Using artists’ artworks**: The works of a number of different artists were used to illustrate the same emotion, so the children were able to see variations in style among the different artists. For example, for the emotion of sadness, the teachers used Picasso’s “The Weeping Woman”, Erich Heckel’s “The Portrait of a Man”, Kathe Kollwitz’s “Mother and Child” and the Chinese painter, Wong Sun Bo’s “After Selling Blood”. In these four paintings, the children tried to discern the different methods used by these artists: e.g., Picasso used the distortion method, Heckel used the extension of the face, Kollwitz used the sad eyes and hands, while Wong used the gesture, and so forth.

A total of 36 children attended the post-test, and the results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change the shape</th>
<th>Facial expression</th>
<th>Comic Symbol</th>
<th>Story Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results reflected the fact that the teacher had more confidence in teaching. Since the theme of the human figure was closer to the children’s experience, the images looked more expressive.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Qualitative data collection was from various sources, included teachers’ and children’s interviews, classroom observations, and children’s artworks analysis. Interviews data were collected in the teachers’ meetings, pre-lesson conference and post-lesson conference, students’ pre-and post-lessons. All interviews were taped. Four classroom observations in 2003 and three classroom observations in 2004, children’s drawing included pre-and post-test, classroom worksheets and classroom drawings. The PowerPoint internal presentation and the final report were used for analysis. These evidences try to bring into some relationship with each other so that they can be compared and contrasted.
Results

There are so many aspects that we can examine related to the teachers’ professional development. According to Davis (1990) suggests that teachers’ professional knowledge includes values, attitudes, perceptions, teaching strategies, modes of inquiry and pedagogical curriculum content. (Thurber, 2004, p.493) In my study, I will focus on teacher’s value in self-reflection and collegial support, attitude to try out the new teaching strategies and the perceptions of children’s learning.

1. Teachers’ value in self reflection and collegial support

Reflective practice is considered by some to be an essential quality in enabling individuals to improve their practice and enhance their own professional development. (Schon, 1987) Houston (2000) points out that reflection and inquiry are not learned by listening to a lecture or by reading a book. They become professional habits through use the “Learning Study” approach provides the opportunities to teachers to plan the same lesson, share the project with peers, gather ideas of teaching the same lesson, analysis students’ learning outcomes and make the further improvements. Various discussions in this project are through teachers’ experiences in their practical teaching in classroom. It can fill the gap of “theory” and “practice” in classroom teaching.

Teacher Lee said, “After each lesson, we conduct the post conference immediately, it is very useful for us to point out the weakness and raise the opinions for improvement. So I can see each lesson has good progress.” This quotation supports the notion that “Learning Study” is a tool for change and transformation through reflection and action. Teacher Yuen raised her opinion that it is not easy for her to observe other colleagues’ classroom teaching in the past due to lack of time and the peer observation culture. She can learn the different teaching styles from colleagues, also, colleagues’ advice can give her chances to improve her teaching. Ms. Wong said, “I have so many years teaching Visual Arts, but still it is a good opportunity for me to work with colleagues to design a lesson together. The experience is fresh, and I am happy to face the new challenges.” “Learning Study” develops the network for colleagues to work together, provides open and trusting environment, and also, the collaborative effort provided by the Institute and the artist, can build up teachers’ confidence and overcome the isolation of teaching that empower teachers’ professional development.

2. Teachers’ attitude to try out the new teaching strategies

In the first meeting, teachers pointed out children in primary four (age 9) lacked of interest in drawing. The children always copied Cartoon and lost their spontaneous creativity. Teachers felt difficulty to teach a good drawing lesson. In the past, questions remain questions, problems remain problems. Teachers did not think deeply how to solve it. In this project, teachers design a
pre-test and see the children are really face the problems as the teachers think. The drawings reflected that more than 90% of children used facial expression to illustrate their feelings and less 15% used other elements, such as shapes, light, mass and colors.

After teachers’ discussion, they design to teach expressive drawings and emphasis on the changes of shapes. Lesson design is focus on two concepts: object of learning and critical features. From the three cycles of teaching, teachers change the object of learning from “draw the story background” to “draw the animal” and “draw the human figure” in order to meet the children’s experiences. This reflects that teachers understand the object of learning cannot be too board and need to be more focus. The “critical features” are good but sometimes teachers are too emphasized on the “line” than “shape”. At the interviews, we ask the children “what have you learned?” children talk “lines” more than “shapes”. Teachers discover that even the wordings on the PowerPoint can influence children’s thinking because the teachers write “line” on the first slide. In this project, teachers have a positive attitude to research an appropriate strategies to teach children is the main success of this project.

3. Teachers’ perceptions in children’s learning

Blocker (2004) points out art education practice is partly an effort to give children a chance to express themselves, to explore their talents in drawing, painting, and so forth. This is what we might call the “practical” side of art education. But we are also trying to help youngsters become more informed and appreciative of the artworld, and that involves knowledge of artists, styles of art, history of art, and so on. This represents the more “theoretical” side of art education (p.187) The study by Kailin found that drawing emotions may best be learned through a study of the work of artists. (Kindler, 2004, p.241) Using comparison of artists’ works can motivate children’s learning in this lesson. Classroom observations revealed that teachers have been changed their teaching strategies from the traditional and constructivist teaching to a critical and analysis style. In comparing the artworks of Picasso, Munch, Kolog’s, teachers did not tell the children what and how the differences of artists expressed and tried to ask the children to find out and compare how the artists expressed different moods. Such as teach the children to look at the figures’ hands, eyes and discover how the shapes changed. Children were not encouraged to copy the drawing style from the artists, and were encouraged to discover artworks characteristic and using their styles to express their feelings finally. As one child said, “In the past, I seldom looked at the artists’ works. Now I fell very interesting, especially Munch’s Scream, it looks impressive to me.” When we ask the children what are the deep impression to them, most of children said they appreciated artists’ works that they seldom learned in the previous lessons. Analysis artworks is the effective way.
Discussions

*How to improve teachers’ learning? - Teachers’ Professional Development in “Learning Study”*

In this project, I can see there are still have many problems. Learning Study is a good approach for teacher to think about “students learning”. To improve teacher’s professional knowledge, teachers should attend a “Learning Study” course first. In this school, only one teacher has attended the course, the other three teachers need to struggle with the theory very hard. In this project, teachers have faced the pressure in classroom observation and video shooting. To provide the comfortable environment, schools should develop the peer coaching culture. Collins (1998) quotes Little’s theory that “coaching facilitates the development of professional and collegial relationships and are based on shared language and a school culture that promotes continual improvement. It reduces isolation and encourages teachers to explore important issues together in an atmosphere of openness.” (p.97) If all the teachers have experiences involved to the peer observation or other public presentation, then develop their ownership of the each lesson will not be so difficult.

*Teach child art or teach good school child art? -Learning Study and children’s drawing*

Children’s drawing is big issue for educators to discuss and debate. From 1940s. Franz Cizek, Victor Lowenfeld, Burkhart…. their theories of child art influenced art educators and teachers so many years. As Lowenfeld asserted that the conception of artistic growth consists the early scribbling, preschematic stages, followed by the schematic stage and the stage of “drawing realism”. They championed the natural, freedom from rules, creativity, and individual expression. (Wilson, 2004) But teachers found that the children, especially in Grade 4 (age 9), always copy from the commercial imagery instead of their own expression. The children lack of confidence in drawing. So that we raise a question, “Can art be taught?”. I agree with Wilson (2004) if we don’t teach children, it may be child art, but it isn’t good child art. In this case, we found that we cannot neglect the Piaget and Lowenfeld’s children’s artistic development theory. From the post-test of children’s drawings, we discover that some students still use their own expression style to draw the objects as the same in the pre-test. Also, children love to use the “cartoon language” in their drawings, that because the visual culture factors in Hong Kong are influenced children’s daily life very deeply. The implication is that the artists’ artworks cannot provide the real experiences as the society’s images to the children so closely? So how can we balance the child art and school child art, fine arts and the commercial arts?

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

This case study explored the experiences of a group of four teachers who took “Learning Study” theory in their teaching children’s drawing. Through the preparation of one lesson, it develops a culture of teaching staff collegiality. As one teacher said, “I appreciate the collaboration and
involvement of our colleagues. We speak out our points in order to do the improvement.” Change the teachers’ value, attitude and perception in teaching to face the Education Reform is important. The three circles of teaching a lesson indicates that a successful lesson requires reflection in action. We need the teachers can be the active, critical and progressive thinkers through the implementation of the “Learning Study” project. We believe that child art express their emotions through drawings and provide a good channel for us to communicate, we need to develop visual art curricula and instructional practices in schools. The concept of “Learning and Awareness” poses a big challenge for us, to discover how students can learn more effectively.

References