E-8: Reconceptualizing learning and teaching through lesson study

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To undo learning in teacher education: A renewed understanding through Agamben's notion of study

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Against the overall backdrop of instrumental and technical discourses of teaching and teacher education, we are too often concerned about “what works” (Biesta, 2007, p. 1) rather than what is “educationally desirable” (Biesta, 2013, p. 129) in teaching and teacher education.

Arguing against the learning or learnification demanded in today’s schooling discourse and practices, Lewis (2014) expresses his plea for Agambenian conception of study which helps us no longer hang on to the goal we envisage. It is precisely the difficulties we encounter, the feelings of insufficiency and confusion, the indeterminate moments involved in Agambenian notion of study that could help us reimagine education, undo the prevalent learnification in schools and teacher education and offer possibilities for educational transformation. Study for Agamben serves as “a provocative alternative that breaks the correspondence between human activity and teleology. It is his theory of study that enables us to retain our (im)potential, and in turn recognize that our very potentiality to not be is in fact our greatest form of freedom” (Lewis, 2011). To study is to suspend the functioning of obedience through ‘preferring not’ to act as such and such a subject within the allotted order of things. Study gives access to the experience of potentiality freed from obedience to any sovereign command. With this suspension, the studier does not obey or break the law but rather profanes it, opening up the law to new potential uses (Lewis, 2014, p. 276).

In study, we are freed from any sovereign command and teleological goals. The process defies the goals of actualization and even suspends the tendency to realize certain ends. Phelan (2015) captures that the important quality of study is the temporary suspension of those forces – economic, social, cultural, religious, or political pervading institutions – that would influence, cajole, or direct students. … the spirit of study is about rupture, interruption, and disorientation of the familiar and the taken-for-granted” (p. 31). One’s withdrawal, suspicion and not being compliant with the system are acknowledged in a good way. Study is an “interminable” and “rhythmic” activity that not only loses a sense of its own end but, more importantly, “does not even desire one” (Agamben 1995, 64). Study, for Agamben, has its own rhythms and patterns which could resist the temptation of being socialized perfectly into the existence and could help the studier withhold and withdraw from actualizing one’s potentiality in certain ends. Study allows humans “to accumulate and freely master their own capacities, to transform them into faculties” (Agamben, 2011, p. 44). I believe there is the radical openness and sensitivity involved in Agambenian study.
Agamben’s study disturbs the means-to-ends way learnification of the society. It recreates new possibilities in the in-determinate, suspended space, probing into the meaning of radical freedom. What Agamben could suggest is that the teachers should have the capacity of not realizing their potential in schools. The suspension of actualizing one’s potential (e.g. to promote student’s scores, or to manage their class efficiently) should not be regarded as a lack of ability or deficiency. Rather it could an attitude which sets free the means-ends connection and fundamentally suspends the ends and opens to all the possibilities, much like Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to” (Melville, 2002, p. 10). Bartleby’s refusal to check accuracy of his work could be taken as an interruption of testing and examination. And it is “a slow and steady withdrawal from not only the logic of examination but also the logic of actualization” (Lewis, 2014, p. 283). The “preferring not” is a deliberate distancing, a suspension of any actualization and a suspicion of the dominant system.

**Keywords:** study, impotentiality, freedom, teacher education
LS as means towards an extended view on learning, a more student centered and inclusive practice?

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Schools and schoolteachers have a daily influence on the lives of children and youth. They are responsible for the students’ acquisition of subject knowledge, but also for their personal development and mental health. The Norwegian school system has been criticized for having a narrow view on learning, where testable short-term goals are prioritized, while the students' personal, social and emotional development is neglected (Befring, 2018). These days, a renewal of the Norwegian national curricula is in its’ final phase. One reason for the renewal has been to emphasize a broader perspective on learning and knowledge. This presentation focus on changes in teacher perception of student and teacher role through exploring teachers talk and written logs during a 4-year research and development project with Lesson Study as method for professional development.

The theoretical frameworks starting point is inclusion as described in the United Nations Salamanca declaration, and the emphasis on student diversity as a resource for all students' learning. Inclusion implies the process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners (UNESCO, 2017). The concept of transformability (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004); that teachers believe they have power to make a difference to what students learn is considered crucial in the process. Transformability implies a contextual view on student needs, which is associated with believing that responding to student difficulties is part of the professional expertise that all teachers need to develop (Skidmore, 1999). It is also found to affect teachers feeling of responsibility towards their students, and the type of interventions teachers respond to student needs with (Rubie-Davis & Rosenthal, 2016; Skidmore, 1999) Based on these theoretical assumptions, our research aims to explore change in teachers’ perceptions of student needs and resources, in practicing the teacher role and in what kind of learning activities (interventions) they choose. Data are audio recordings of teachers’ meetings and written logs. Recordings and logs from the first two LS-cycles and the eight cycle has been compared using content analyses (Krippendorff, 2004; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) in order to answer the research questions. Findings in terms of change in perception of student needs and resources, in practicing teacher role and in choice of learning activities will be presented.


**Keywords:** student centered, student needs, inclusion, teacher role
Reconstructing student differences: Teacher learning in lesson study

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Object:

This qualitative study examines teacher beliefs about student differences in the process of lesson study. In this article, we analyze teachers’ collaborative discussions during lesson study and individual interviews about their lesson study experiences. The primary purposes of this study are: (1) to acquire an in-depth understanding of the nature of Singapore teachers’ beliefs about diversity based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language, and how they enact these beliefs during the process of participating in lesson study; and (2) to identify the factors during the lesson study process that mediate teachers’ understanding of their roles of working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Method:

We examine how teachers construct student difference as a precondition for their work and how they, in the course of lesson study, begin to re-define this problem and their perceptions of their students over two years in Singapore. This study is situated in two elementary schools (School A and School B) serving low-income neighborhoods (most residents rent apartment in these areas) in Singapore. School A is in a mature estate in the east of Singapore with an enrolment of about 900 pupils and 60 teachers/staff. A large percentage of the pupils came from families in the lower strata of social and economic status who largely lack interest and support in the academics. To achieve an accurate representation of teachers’ beliefs, researchers have turned to a constructivist approach to understand beliefs from the teachers’ perspective via observation (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Hyland & Noffke, 2005; Jiang, 2015). Corroboration of beliefs with observation in the teacher’s classrooms can validate the understanding of a belief elicited from interviews. And such an exploration into subjective meaning required qualitative methods of inquiry (Pole, 2003). We followed this line of research and used multiple methods, such as in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of written reflections, in the fieldwork to probe what the participant teachers think and believe regarding social diversity and the implications for teaching. Codes, patterns, and themes emerged from the data, and analysis was related to the contexts in which the teachers were learning to teach. This set of strategies allows us to get first-hand information about what the participant teachers thought about their experiences with lesson study, and to raise questions about observed contradictions between self-reported beliefs and observed practice.

Results:

We categorize the teachers’ talk about their student differences as emphasizing (1) innate-deficit; (2) contextual-deficit; (3) innate-capable; and (4) contextual-capable. During the process of lesson study, teachers’ talk shifted not only from deficit-oriented perspective to more capacity oriented perspective of
their students but also to see their students as more complex beings whose problems in school are not insurmountable obstacles for classroom work but as something that the teachers can start to do pedagogical responses to. Lesson study provides following affordances to foster such a change: (1) eliciting beliefs in dialogue; (2) creating space to for alternative perspectives; and (3) scrutinizing evidence for action.

**Conclusion:**

The study provides insights of how teachers’ understanding of their students from diverse backgrounds, content and teaching change or re-enforced as they participate in the lesson study activities, and how lesson study provides opportunities for such a change.

**Keywords:** teacher beliefs, student diversity, lesson study