

Teachers' Engagement in Lesson Study for Learning Community

Shaping Teachers' Beliefs about Students from Disadvantaged Social Backgrounds

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Teachers have complex cultural beliefs of diversity, which can be further sensitized.
- Lesson study that is enriched with collaborative analysis of student work may shape teachers' cultural beliefs of diversity.

BACKGROUND

The urgency of teaching diverse learners is aptly demonstrated in many parts of the world as the ethnic, racial, class, and linguistic diversity grows rapidly. Such diversity brings about opportunities and creativity as well as challenges for teachers to ensure educational equity and provide high-quality teaching for all students from diverse backgrounds, especially those presently underserved by the educational system (Buehl, & Beck, 2014; Civitillo, Juang, & Schachner, 2018).

FOCUS OF STUDY

This qualitative study examined teacher cultural beliefs about diversity and illustrated how teachers (re)construct student differences during lesson study in two elementary schools in Singapore.

KEY FINDINGS

We found that teachers have mixed deficit or assets oriented beliefs about how students identified as "lower-progress" learn as situated in their lower socio-economic background. Based on the perceived students' deficits and assets, the teachers also developed and shared responsive teaching heuristics, either capacity-oriented or remedy-oriented, to work with different groups of students. Therefore, these beliefs influence teachers' choice of teaching strategies for working with students from diverse backgrounds.

During the process of lesson study, some teachers' talk shifted to a more asset-based perspective of their students and actively engaged in different hypotheses to help their students learn. These shifts came about through an in-depth collaborative discussion on students' work during the lesson study sessions. An important enabler for change is the presence of a knowledgeable other, who can provide insights for lesson study participants to interrogate their own practices.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Teachers do not speak with one voice. They have multiple voices that blend the different discourses from policy, teacher education, and internally persuasive ideas to make sense of and shape their own practices. Given that teachers' cultural beliefs of diversity influence their choice of teaching strategies for working with students from diverse backgrounds, more research investigating teachers' practice-based learning experiences is needed.

In addition, lesson study (as among other professional learning communities) may be able to shape teachers' cultural beliefs of diversity and eventually change their teaching practices when it provides opportunities for teachers to engage in in-depth discussions on students' work. The ways to engage in these discussions and the role of the knowledgeable other will need further exploration.

PARTICIPANTS

This study is situated in two elementary schools (School A and School B) serving low-income neighbourhoods in Singapore. We observed Grade 4 lesson study team of 9 teachers who teach Math and

English in School A, and Grade 4 Math (n = 12) and Grade 4 English teachers (n = 8) in School B during their lesson study cycles. We also conducted individual interviews with some of them, on a voluntary basis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We used individual interviews, observations, and analysis of written reflections.

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