

How to make Lesson Study work in a one-year university-level initial teacher education programme: conditional input factors and challenges.

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Introduction

Lesson Study (LS) has gained international recognition as an effective collaborative method for enhancing pedagogical practice. LS involves teachers collaboratively reviewing materials, establishing lesson objectives, and designing research lessons (RLs) focused on improving student learning. However, implementing LS presents challenges, including time constraints, increased workload, anxiety, and insufficient support. De Vries (2017) identified critical preconditions for successful LS, including teachers' prior knowledge, attitudes, and organizational factors. Kager (2023) refined these factors, categorizing them into compositional, structural, and contextual levels. The integration of LS (ILS) into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, particularly through school internships and master's theses, presents a promising avenue for overcoming these challenges and enhancing pedagogical and reflective practices. This study investigates the conditions that enhance the efficacy of the ILS model within a one-year university-level ITE program. The research aims to identify compositional, structural, and contextual factors perceived as supportive or constraining in the ILS model.

Methodology

Conducted from October 2021 to June 2022 within a one-year ITE program in Belgium, this study implemented a modified Dudley LS model (2014). Participants, comprising six interns and two teachers-in-training, were paired into teams to promote collaboration, research, teaching, observation and reflection skills. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and master's theses. Analysis was based on Kager's (2023) conceptual framework, categorizing data into compositional, structural, and contextual factors. This approach facilitated the identification of both supportive and hindering factors, providing valuable insights for optimal conditions in the ILS model within an ITE setting.

Results

Compositional Characteristics

Student teachers' experiences with diversity, prior knowledge, and personal characteristics within LS teams revealed that age and gender were not significant factors. However, subject matter expertise and team composition influenced collaboration. Intern-teacher-in-training duos reported beneficial collaboration, while diversity in subject-specific teams faced increased workloads. Interpersonal qualities such as communication and trust were crucial for effective collaboration.

Contextual Characteristics

Student teachers were generally satisfied with the support provided by the ITE program. However, some interns felt a lack of follow-up support affected their self-efficacy. Scheduling challenges, particularly for interns, and interim deadlines, particularly for teachers-in-training, found increased their workload.

Structural Characteristics

All teams completed the four-step LS process, but interns struggled with selecting research topics due to limited familiarity with their pupils. (Re)designing RLs proved time-consuming, ranging from 2 to 30 hours. The use of LS manuals correlated with positive learning outcomes. However, a failure to utilize the manual led to a reduced understanding of LS features. Overall,