Lesson Study in Thailand

1. Introduction

After the 1999 Educational Acts were enacted, Thailand was put into an educational reform movement. Most school teachers have been attempting to improve their teaching practices. Unfortunately, they do not find good ways to improve their everyday work. Most teachers still use a traditional teaching style focusing on coverage of content, but they do not emphasize students’ learning processes and their attitudes toward learning with understanding. More importantly, a number of teachers classify themselves into a reforming group (e.g., master teachers and innovative teachers) but, in effect, do not realize that they are still in an old paradigm group.

Lesson Study is a comprehensive and well-articulated process for examining practices that many Japanese teachers are engaging in (Fernandez, Cannon & Chokshi, 2003). In fact, recently a number of American researchers and educators have suggested that Lesson Study might be an incredibly beneficial approach to examining practices for US teachers (Lewis, C., 2002; Fernandez et al., 2003).

In Thailand, there is also another initiative to use Lesson Study to improve the teacher education program in mathematics. In 2002, the Faculty of Education at Khon Kaen University, in an attempt to improve the teacher education program, conducted a project to investigate how student teachers develop their own pedagogy. In addition, to investigate how students in the classroom are responding to the open-approach teaching method and whether or not they recognize their learning experiences.

2. Initiative Project in Mathematics Teacher Education

2.1 Background of the Project

The research project was conducted in the 2002 academic year in 7 schools in Khon Kaen province in the northeastern part of Thailand. It was aimed at investigating changes in student teachers’ pedagogy and their professional development when using the open-approach teaching method (Nohda, 2000). The project
was also aimed at clarifying how school students recognize their learning experiences. The following process of Lesson Study has been conducted: cooperatively constructing lesson plans, implementing those plans in the classroom, discussion about lesson plans and individual teacher teaching progression. Fifteen 4th-year student teachers voluntarily participated in this project. According to the requirements of the mathematics education program, they conducted their practice teaching at their selected schools for one semester. They had to follow some regular activities designed by the program and had to follow some additional required activities designed by the research project. In what follows, regular activities and required activities for this project are described.

2.2. The Research Project Settings

2.2.1 Regular Activities Requiring all Student Teachers to be done

All student teachers were required to teach at schools in the Khon Kaen urban area 6-8 periods (about 50 minutes per period) a week. School teachers who serve as school supervisors may assign appropriate work to the student teachers. For one semester, the student teachers were supervised four times by school supervisors and another three times by supervisors from the faculty of Khon Kaen University. They also had to conduct an action research project under the stewardship of his/her research advisor. Furthermore, they had to attend three-hours of seminar and/or to meet with their research advisors once a week.

2.2.2 Required Activities for Student Teachers in the Project

Fifteen student teachers who participated in the research project had attended a one-month workshop for constructing lesson plans to be used later in the first semester of 2002 academic year. They were grouped according to school levels they intended to teach. Six were in the 7th-grade group. Five were in the 8th-grade group and four in the 9th-grade group. Coached by the researcher, they spent about 6 hours a day constructing lesson plans using open-ended problems.
In order to dialogue and review their experiences of the open-approach teaching method, the 15 student teachers attended a special seminar organized by the researcher weekly. In this seminar they expressed their common concern, interesting points and change in some particular students’ behavior. Furthermore, they were expected to develop ideas for the conduction of their action research projects. They also kept a journal during the semester related to their teaching experiences. This journal was used for discussion in the special weekly seminar and for data analysis of the research project.

2.3 Research Results

2.3.1 Change in Student Teachers’ Pedagogical Practices

During the first half of the semester all student teachers in the project experienced some difficulty adjusting to their new teaching roles and classroom organization. Participation in the weekly seminar facilitated the student teachers gradual change of the teachers’ role. The most critical point of change was encountered while sharing their differing teaching experiences among friends and colleagues. Sharing experiences with their friends during the weekly seminar not only resolved their common concerns but also developed and expanded their own pedagogy, teaching practices and professional development. The greatest paradigm shift for student teachers’ was that teaching mathematics does not mean focusing on the coverage of content but emphasizing the students’ learning processes, original ideas, attitudes towards learning mathematics and satisfying one’s own competence.

Most of the student teachers saw the positive benefits of conducting action research while simultaneously completing their student teaching. They have come to realize that doing action research can help them develop a wider perspective on how to view their classrooms. Moreover, they acknowledged that action research may help improve teachers’ everyday practices. Most importantly, student teachers in the project changed their attitudes
towards learning from academic learning to life-long learning. Their thought process on teaching and learning has been shifted into a new one which is seen as a unification of living and learning. This also influences their values of their own contribution to society, the core values we need for Thai society.

2.3.2 Experiences of School Students on Learning through the Open-Approach Method

According to the survey results of 1200 students in all schools in the project, most of the school students have positive attitudes towards learning through the open-approach method. In all areas of the survey, the school students indicated a marked improvement in their learning environment and capabilities in comparison to their traditional classroom. Regarding the classroom activity, the school students responded that they have more opportunities to act, think, play an active role, do something original, and conclude things by oneself. Regarding the change of their own learning process, they show some interesting responses as follows: more reasonable, more skillful in observation, more cool-hearted, know how to work cooperatively and more confidence in asking “why?” and “how come?” type questions.

2.3.3 Expansion of Lesson Study Approach

The project provides many ideas for the implementation of the Lesson Study approach and on-going professional development. Student teachers in classroom settings provides for an invaluable opportunity to further educate the professional teacher. It is worthwhile to conceive that programs for professional development should start in the earlier years of teacher education programs and be continuous for seasoned professional teachers. So far, Lesson Study approach has provided great influence on the reform of professional development in Thailand. The National Commission on Science and Mathematics Education incorporates the concept of Lesson Study into the frameworks on the development of science and mathematics education. In 2004, the Office of Basic Education Commission provided funding support
to organize training for supervisors in order to supervise school teachers participating in the Lesson Study project of Khon Kaen University.

On the international level, Khon Kaen University in cooperation with Minsai Center at Laos PDR, East Asian Circle of Applied Technology of Japan, and Educational Development Fund have organized training programs for mathematics and science teachers from Laos PDR since 2002. This training program also implements the integrated open-approach teaching method and Lesson Study approach. In 2004-2005, Khon Kaen University cooperated with Plan International Organization which also implemented the Lesson Study approach to improve mathematics teaching in the northeastern part of Thailand. This kind of professional development has created teacher networking among countries in the Great Mekhong Sub-region.
References

