

# **Startup Learning Community Approach - Case Study in Vietnam**

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## **1. Introduction**

International evidence suggests that educational reform's progress depends on teachers' individual and collective capacity and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning. Building capacity is therefore critical. Capacity is a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning, organizational conditions and culture, and infrastructure of support. Put together, it gives individuals, groups, whole school communities and school systems the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time.

What are Professional Learning Communities? In this section, we examine what the literature has to say about the term Professional learning communities (PLCs), look at how the concept has developed, and 'unpack' the different words. Defining 'Professional learning community' There is no universal definition of a learning communities. PLC may have shades of interpretation in different contexts. The idea of improving schools by developing professional learning communities is currently in vogue. Richard Dufour (2006) talks about the professional learning community consists of 3 main ideas. That is ensuring that students learn, a culture of collaboration and a focus on results. To be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world, it is suggested that whole school communities need to work and learn together to take charge of change, finding the best ways to enhance young people's learning.

Professional learning communities are identified by professional collaboration to improve student learning. According to Leonard & Leonard (2001): Professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and develop plans for the purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. In effect, collaborative practice is exemplified when school staff members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to be more effective teachers so that their students can become more successful learners. Louis and Kruse (1995) maintain that a core characteristic of the professional learning community is an unwavering focus on student learning. In professional learning communities the principal encourages teachers to pursue personal development as part of their job. In one approach, the principal helps teachers integrate what they learn in professional development by meeting in small groups to discuss classroom application of those learnings. People read articles and books and form study groups that encourage reflection, inquiry, sharing and dialoguing. Individual and team judgment is valued more than rules, policies, forms, and procedures. Most importantly, everyone is encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and development and this is considered to be a norm of the school's culture.

Prestine (1993) suggests three factors necessary to create professional learning communities in schools. Principals must have the ability to share authority, facilitate the work of the staff, and have the ability to participate without dominating.

## **1.1 Lesson Study**

Even more basic is the whole idea of instruction as something that can and should be improved through consultation with colleagues, trial in the classroom and critique. (Lewis, 2000, pp. 32–33). Lesson study, a Japanese form of professional development that centers on collaborative study of live classroom lessons, has spread rapidly in the Vietnam since 2002. Lesson Study has also been introduced in South-East Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia (see, for example, White & Lim, 2008), as well as South America, South Africa (Ono & Ferreira, 2010), and Australia (for example, Hollingsworth & Oliver, 2005). China too has a long history of improving teaching and learning through school-based professional learning communities named Teacher Research Groups (see, for example, Yang, 2009). While Lesson Study takes place across all curriculum areas in Japan, it is perhaps most commonly practiced in all types, and this has tended to be the case in other countries too.

## **1.2 Policy Review for the Professional Development**

The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam has issued the guideline No. 5555 (MOET, No. 5555/BGDĐT-GDTrH, 8.10.2014) to guide the renewal of professional activities for teachers in schools. The main goal of this policy focuses on the following main points: improving the quality of professional activities in secondary schools, focusing on innovating teaching methods and testing and assessing students' capacity development; helping managers and teachers in the first step to actively select content to build teaching topics in each subject and integrated and interdisciplinary thematic subjects suitable for active learning activities organization, self-reliance, creativity of students; using active teaching methods and techniques to develop thematic teaching processes to develop students' abilities and qualities; and familiarizing yourself with the form of training, retraining, learning and professional activities online.

One of the highlights of this policy is to guide teachers in analyzing and drawing lessons. The lesson analysis can be implemented based on the following specific criteria [Moet, 2014] found in Table 1 (next page).

Based on the theoretical framework of PLCs, Lesson study and Guideline 5555 (Moet 2014), we conducted research at a secondary school in suburban Hanoi to determine what is the role of lesson study in PLCs at school.

The University of Education- VNU (UED) and Hiroshima University project “Startup Learning Community Approach” began in 2017. One of its goals is to improve learning community in schools in rural areas. The project uses a particular approach to active learning, called Lesson Study (LS). After several discussions with schools and teachers, a lesson study pilot at Nguyen Truc high school was implemented from Oct 2017-May 2018. To help teachers understand its components, UED have organized participatory workshops for teachers on a variety of topics: Identifying the main concepts, Productive questions, Group work, Using effective teaching aids, Continuous assessment. Participating teachers get on-going support to change “chalk and talk teaching” through a monthly visit of UED lecturer who observe lessons, provide supportive feedback and review lesson plans for the coming week. We found the model of LS

where teachers studied together the lesson, focused on students learning and shared their findings. By shifting to a LS approach and using team meetings for professional development issues, it was thought that more teachers could be reached, teacher capacity to collaborate on content and pedagogy could be enhanced, and a focus on student learning rather than just teaching practice could improve school quality.

**Table 1: Specific criteria for lesson analysis**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
1. Planning and teaching materials	The suitability of the learning tasks with regard to the purpose, content and teaching methods being used.
	The level of clarity of the objectives, content, organization and results required of each learning task.
	The suitability of the teaching facilities and materials with regard to the activities in the class.
	The rationale of the grading and assessment processes during these activities.
2. Organize learning activities for students	The level of visual effect and attractiveness for the students of the delivery of the learning tasks.
	The ability to observe and detect students' difficulties in a timely manner.
	The effectiveness and suitability of the supporting measures to encourage students to cooperate and help each other in their learning tasks.
	The teacher's effectiveness in summarizing, analysing and evaluating the students' results and discussing the process.
3. Students' activities	The ability to receive and be ready to perform the learning tasks of all the students in class.
	The level of activity, creativity and cooperation among students to complete the tasks.
	The level of student participation in presenting, exchanging and discussing the results of the learning tasks.
	The accuracy of the students' results in the learning tasks.

### 1.3 Objectives of This Pilot

- Developing learning communities for teachers and students
- Improving knowledge and pedagogy for teachers
- Developing students' thinking skills
- Defining students' difficulties in learning
- Creating cooperation for sustainable professional development

### 1.4 Activities

- Observing the live class with the students.
- Meeting and discussion after the class within the subject team
- Developing plan of the next lesson meeting
- Develop plan for student learning community
- Meeting and discussion after some classes' lessons with all subject teams in school.

## **2. Study Design**

### **2.1 Research Lesson Study Are Actual Classroom Lessons with Students, But Typically Share Five Special Characteristics.**

- 1) Research lessons study are observed by UED professors. The observing professors who are supporting to the teacher in providing both of knowledge of the subject and teaching skills. Those professors will work in a team after the research lesson to develop the lesson in the next phase;
- 2) Research lessons study are observed other teachers. The observing teachers may include just the faculty within a subject team, or a wider group; a wider group may discuss after the research lesson for the better lesson;
- 3) Research lessons study are designed to bring to life in a lesson a particular goal or vision of education. The whole faculty chooses a research theme or focus. Research outcome will be Developing learning communities for teachers and students; improving knowledge and pedagogy for teachers; developing students' thinking skills; defining students' difficulties in learning; and creating cooperation for sustainable professional development. The research lesson study is not a finished product that is expected to be used, but an example of a goal or vision of education in action.
- 4) Research lesson study are recorded. Usually teachers record these lessons in multiple ways, including videotape, audiotape, observational notes, and copies of student work. The particular data gathered depend upon the issues of interest to the teachers at least 3 (three) planning the lesson. Often other teachers within the school are asked to collect particular types of data.
- 5) Research lessons study are discussed. A discussion will be open really after the lesson. This is an open discussion for the researchers – professors from UED and the teachers who was carried out the lesson and the observing teachers. Research lessons study are conducted in all subject areas, and in non-subject areas as well - for example, for sharing the teaching skills to build community.

### **2.2 Selection of the Lesson**

There are 15 lessons from Biology and Chemistry curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2006)

The process of lesson selection was discussed with teachers on October 4, 2017. These lessons were chosen because teachers found several concepts to be difficult for them to understand and to teach as well as challenging for students to learn.

### **2.3 Pilot School**

In 2002, Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) decided to carry out an innovation to improve active teaching and learning in schools. Annual training workshops on active teaching methods have been organized by MOET for all teachers in the nation. However, these training workshops are usually more theoretical than practical. Once teachers return to their

schools after the workshop and they start to try to implement active teaching, they get confused and experience difficulties. They need considerable support if they are to implement effectively this approach to teaching and learning. Meanwhile classroom observations (carried out as a part of grade level team responsibilities) are usually carried out in an evaluative mode and are not designed to encourage teacher reflection. Grade level teams meet bi-weekly for 2 hours but usually focus more on management issues and school activities rather than professional improvement. One of its goals is to improve active teaching in participating schools in rural areas so that we chose Nguyen Truc Secondary School, which is located in Thanh oai District, Hanoi, Vietnam.

#### **2.4 Participants from School**

- Leaders of NTSS (1 school principal & 02 school vice principal)
- 20 teachers teaching at Nguyen Truc Secondary School
- VNU UED: 8 lecturers & Project Staff
- Hiroshima University: 1 Professor (CICE)

#### **2.5 Procedures**

Step 1: teachers prepare the lesson plan together and share it to the UED lecturers

Step 2: teachers discuss their lesson plan with the UED lecturers

Step 3: teaching, observing and reflecting on each lesson

### **3. Lesson Study Implementation**

#### **3.1 The following Steps Are Applied to the Study:**

- Observing the live class with the students.
- Meeting and discussion after the class within the subject team
- Developing plan of the next lesson meeting
- Develop plan for student learning community
- Meeting and discussion after some classes' lessons with all subject teams in school.

#### **3.2 Some observations from Literature Review**

The observations from the literature review are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Summary of Observations from Literature Review**

Date	Study Contents	Content to Discussion and Finding
5/10/2017	<p>Teacher: Pham Thi Hong Hanh</p> <p>- <i>Ngẫu hứng hồi hương</i> – Hạ Tri Chương (grade 7)</p> <p>*activity 1- teacher give a question: In which class do you have to live away from your family, home -&gt; do you remember your grandparents, parents?</p> <p>- Contact: nostalgia for homeland in some verses of Duong verse (Ly Bach)</p> <p>*activity 2: Reading and -learning</p> <p>1. Author 2. The poem (Methodology: give question and answer, presentation)</p> <p>*activity 3. Read-analysis 1 The first of two sentences (Methodology: give question and answer, presentation) + teamwork: find the expression of the magic in 2 verses)</p> <p>2. The last two sentences (Methodology: give question and answer, presentation)</p> <p>- Tools: map shown on P.P to see the distance from the homeland to where the author works</p> <p>*activity 4. summary Group work: prepare at home, map the lesson content</p> <p>* Questions for group discussion at the end of the day:</p> <p>- What is homeland - Expression of homeland love</p>	<p>- T1: There are some cases where students have "abnormal" expression, not paying attention to the lesson, but the teacher ignores (just looking at the camera, looking out).</p> <p>- T2: Students need to be able to express their own feelings more.</p> <p>- T3: group work a lot; some content is not suitable.</p> <p>- T4: The group activity of pre-prepared summation at home is not reasonable.</p> <p>- T5: Teachers have combined many methods, positive student activities</p> <p>Finding</p> <p>- Many students do not pay attention to the lesson</p> <p>- Students do not have many opportunities to express their thoughts</p>
16/11/2017	<p>- <i>Chiếc lược ngà</i> (grade 9)</p> <p>- Teacher: Pham Thi Hong Hanh</p> <p>*activity 1: Teachers let students observe some pictures of the American imperial massacre in My Lai. Students respond to thoughts when viewing photos.</p> <p>*activity 2: Introduce the lesson</p> <p>*activity 3: Teacher instructs students to analyze the character of Mr. Sau.</p>	<p>1. T1</p> <p>- Teachers are confident, experienced, well prepared.</p> <p>- Should analyze, comment carefully the key details of the work.</p> <p>2. T2</p> <p>- Teachers have good demeanor, attract students</p> <p>- Use images more effectively</p> <p>- Pay attention to group tasks and group</p>

Date	Study Contents	Content to Discussion and Finding
	<p>+ Methodology: give question and answer, presentation</p> <p>+ Question: What situation does the author put Mr. Sau in?</p> <p>+ Who is Mr. Sau's most eager to meet?</p> <p>+ How does Mr. Sau live in a state?</p> <p>+ Teachers ask students to summarize the story of Mr. Sau preparing to break up the road.</p> <p>+ Teacher asks: How do students comment on feelings in stories?</p> <p>*activity 4: teachers guide students to generalize the work</p> <p>Group work:</p> <p>+ Teacher divides class into 8 groups:</p> <p>group1,2,3,4: Synthesis of specials about art.</p> <p>group5,6: What does the story mean?</p> <p>group7,8: Why is the story named ivory comb?</p> <p>Discussion time: 2 minutes</p> <p>*activity 5: Teacher summarizes and lets students listen to the song</p>	<p>work time more appropriately.</p> <p>3. T3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Should pay attention to practice</li> <li>- Teachers should observe and guide students to work in groups, interact with students more.</li> </ul> <p>Finding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are not familiar with the preparation of homework, students are not used to group discussion in class.</li> </ul>
25/1/2018	<p>- <i>Nước Đại Việt ta</i> (grade 8)</p> <p>- Teacher: Pham Thi Hong Hanh</p> <p>*activity 1: teachers guide students to learn</p> <p>+ Teachers ask students to recall information about authors and works</p> <p>+ Methodology: give question and answer, presentation</p> <p>*activity 2: Teachers guide students to learn text</p> <p>+ Methodology: presentation, sample reading, questioning, group discussion, tablecloth techniques</p> <p>+ Teachers guide students to learn about ideological ideas, artistic measures</p> <p>+ Group work: What content has existed in the South Mountain River and what factors appear in Vietnam to assert national sovereignty?</p>	<p>1. T1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers prepare good lessons, use many modern and positive methods in teaching hours</li> <li>- Create a lively atmosphere in the classroom</li> </ul> <p>2. T2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Should decorate the classroom, for students to sit in groups will be more effective.</li> </ul> <p>3. T3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When students answer, teachers should have comments and follow directions</li> <li>- Should emphasize the rhythm when reading expressive text</li> </ul> <p>4. T4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The interaction between learners was more noticeable than the previous lesson</li> <li>- Pay attention to the relationship between text and problems in today's</li> </ul>

Date	Study Contents	Content to Discussion and Finding
		life. Finding - Students show excitement and interest in the lesson - Some weak students have not kept up with the lesson content.
20/12/2018	Thầy thuốc giỏi cốt nhất ở tấm lòng (grade 6) Teacher: Vũ Thị Hương *activity 1: <i>Observe the photo of the physician, introduce the lesson</i> *activity 2: 1. Guiding students to read text: method of reading the role-playing role 2. Guide students to learn about authors - works - Students present the preparation of the author-work (Origin, layout, topic), teacher comments and knowledge - student summary text *activity 3: <i>Reading</i> 1. Introducing the attitude of Pham Ban's orders: Call students to present the pre-prepared section about Pham Ban, the question and answer PP. 2. The medical ethics of the doctor's orders Pham Ban: - Teachers allow students to observe pictures of dilemmas of Pham Ban's orders, using question and answer methods on how to deal with the situation of the doctor's command Pham Ban, thinking of students on how to handle the situation. - Overview of qualities and ethics of the doctor Pham Ban's orders. 3. Happiness of the doctor's order Pham Ban - Using question and answer method - Students speak the concept of happiness - Students watch clips of Dr. Nguyen Anh Tri - Introduction about Vietnamese physician's day	1. T1: - Teachers prepare carefully - good lectures - Students actively and positively, coordinating smoothly with teachers 2. T2: - Teaching hours are successful - Combining typical methods of the subject - System of rich questions, integrated with other subjects such as History. 3. T3: - Renovation lessons, successful application of some positive teaching methods - Feedback: slightly away from art and content, should reorganize activities to suit the time 4. T4: - Should reduce the operation. - The group discussion should review the requirement: this is the translation, not the author's title for the lesson. - The task of assigning groups at home should add tasks, not so simple to promote the exploration and creativity in students. 5. T5: - Group tasks should be challenging - Pay attention to teaching specific types - Clip: a bit long, so introduce more about the doctor in the clip for students to understand the virtue of that doctor. Finding - Teachers have used quite a few proficient and successful teaching methods: teaching groups, using games, playing role ...

Date	Study Contents	Content to Discussion and Finding
	<p>*activity 4: <i>summary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview of content and art value</li> <li>- Reading memo: textbook</li> <li>- Group discussion: Why is the author entitled the good physician at heart?</li> <li>- Puzzle</li> <li>- Play drama: skits about the attitude of Pham Ban's orders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers have attracted and created the students' attention in teaching activities</li> <li>- It is necessary to adjust some contents of lesson knowledge to be more accurate and suitable to the genre characteristics</li> </ul>
21/2/2019	<p>Câu câu khiến (grade 8) Teacher: Trương Thị Chính</p> <p>*activity 1: <i>Instruct students to learn the formalities and functions of the sentence required</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher give example about <i>sentence required</i>, uses questionnaires - answers to analyze examples, draws form and function characteristics of <i>sentence required</i></li> <li>- Teachers use the form of tables, asking students to fill in information, teachers finalize knowledge.</li> <li>- Teacher generalized by mind map</li> </ul> <p>*activity 2: <i>Guide students to expand the form and function characteristics of sentence required through 2 exercises-</i></p> <p>*activity 3: <i>Guide students to practice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puzzle.</li> </ul>	<p>1. T1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers prepare carefully, lessons to ensure knowledge</li> <li>- Feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Students' support with lessons is not high.</li> <li>+ Should add content about sentence discrimination by structure and sentence divided by purpose of speaking.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>2. T2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rich question system</li> <li>- Some activities should give students quick answers to save time in class.</li> </ul> <p>3. T3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers are well prepared, diversified forms of teaching, rich use of active teaching methods, technology investment.</li> <li>- Feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Should focus on the purpose of communication when teaching <i>sentence required</i>, can reduce exercises in textbooks to focus on exercises, practical situations.</li> <li>+ Writing activities: should be clearly individual or group activities, should be assigned to students to write home.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>4. T4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers should pay attention to how to communicate with students more, when students answer wrongly, they should put another question, suggesting that students can answer.</li> </ul> <p>Finding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language when teaching: should pay attention to select appropriate and rich</li> </ul>

Date	Study Contents	Content to Discussion and Finding
		language, can let students play or use clips to see the change of intonation when using <i>sentence required</i> . - Students had the attention, actively participated in the lesson, but some students did not keep up with the lesson process. - Group discussion activities have not attracted all members of the group to participate in the discussion.

### 3.3 Discussion and reflection

From observations, discussions and interviews, several general points emerge from some lesson.

#### 3.3.1 Teacher Learning

- Teachers learned how to make connections of several concepts in a lesson and connections to a real life with the use of productive questions to promote students' critical thinking,
- Teachers commented in the discussion about the benefits of cooperating to improve the lesson. The teacher especially noted the importance of advice from colleagues as she adapted the lesson in light of their teaching. In an interview she reported that “while observing the other two teachers, I tried to look closely at student difficulties to find ways to teach my students better.” After the lesson, she asked “How can I teach my students to understand these concepts? How can I help my students to overcome these difficulties? Can I use these photos?” The participants shared different strategies with her.
- In Vietnam, teachers are required to observe colleagues at least one times per month. The prevailing approach is to give a grade and then feedback on rather trivial areas of teaching, such as handwriting on the chalkboard. In this pilot, teachers focused on student learning, they shared their ideas openly, and they discussed different strategies to improve the lesson the next time--all in a collective, relaxing, supportive way.

#### 3.3.2 Student Learning

- Improved their ability to present in front of the class.
- Improved overall student learning and especially that of weak students

#### 3.3.3 UED's Learning

- The UED staff person had a chance to reconsider the kind of support she needed to provide teachers to improve their content knowledge. She also saw the need to improve

their skills in reading maps, globes, charts and tables so they could better teach the lesson and predict better student problems that might arise when teaching the lesson.

- During the discussion of the lesson plan UED faculty learned that teachers in the LS group (with UED faculty support) could develop the capacity to focus on how to predict student difficulties. This enabled them to plan an effective review of needed prior knowledge and /or skills related to the current lesson. Doing this had a dual purpose: to help students (especially the weak ones who usually find answers in the textbook during class and just memorize information when at home) become more engaged learners in the current lesson and secondly as a way to help teachers learn how to finish the lesson in time.
- UED staff also learned that in collaboration with teachers in the LS team, they could find strategies to overcome student difficulties in learning content. They did this by analyzing specifically the reasons why students were having such problems. For example, students might have forgotten previous knowledge or lacked the skills needed to use teaching aids effectively. Teachers might not have explained the concepts well or teachers might have used questions that were not suitable.
- In the discussions of lesson plans and how to provide feedback, UED faculty learned that it was important for participating teachers to bring all teaching aids that might be used to team meetings for discussion. When this was done, it helped the team analyze content and pedagogical issues more deeply. As a result, when teachers better understood how to use teaching aids effectively, they improved student learning.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Drawing on examples of Japanese and Vietnamese lesson study, we propose that three types of research are needed if lesson study is to avoid the fate of so many other once-promising reforms that were discarded before being fully understood or well implemented. The proposed research includes development of a descriptive knowledge base; explication of the innovation's mechanism; and iterative cycles of improvement research.

We identify three changes in the structure and norms of educational research that would enhance the field's capacity to study emerging innovations such as lesson study. These changes include rethinking the routes from educational research to educational improvement and recognizing a "local proof route"; building research methods and norms that will better enable us to learn from innovation practitioners; and increasing our capacity to learn across cultural boundaries.

This form of professional development led to important changes in participating teachers. They learned how to promote students' thinking by asking productive questions and linking knowledge to real life. In addition, teachers began to focus on student difficulties when learning the lesson with a focus on how teachers could find ways help students (especially weak students) learn better. Finally, they found these pilots of LS useful and significant for them as ways to improve cooperation among teachers. Teachers also developed their sense of professionalism in

many aspects as a result of the LS pilot.

Students improved their learning and thinking skills in many ways. They felt more comfortable and confident in their class instead being bored or unsure of themselves as a result of finding answers in the textbook or rote memorization at home. Perhaps most significantly, the weak students in each class had a chance to receive more attention and to be integrated more into the lessons. Thanks to that, they could study better and learn more.

The UED staff member also learned many interesting things. First, they improved their understanding of areas of content and pedagogy where high school teachers may have difficulty. This knowledge will be very useful for their in-service training students at the university to become high school teachers. Secondly, their understanding of these weaknesses in content knowledge and skill has made them more sympathetic to these teachers and increased their sense of responsibility to assist both teachers and students to learn more. As a result, they have a greater sense of pride in their own work.

These pilots also show that cooperation between UED and high school teachers is very necessary. The high school teachers actually need to improve knowledge and pedagogy while the UED staff need to know more the practical problems those teachers and students face in rural schools. This connection should be built and developed for a long time. In fact, from the pilots, the relationship of UED and high school teachers have become closer and better. They learned and shared each other many useful things. Developing “Lesson Study” in this way is one of the good ways to build the community learning not only between high school teachers and the universities but also between teacher and teacher.

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