



School-based Research and Professional Learning With the Aim at Improving Classroom Practice

Wang Jie & Gu lingyuan

jjwangjie@163.com

<http://xbyx.cersp.com>

Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences



Review

School-based teaching research focuses on "having well preparation before lessons, designing a brief lesson plan and establishing a routine of preparing lessons", and "how to adjust teaching strategies based on student needs and social conditions" (Ministry of Education (1957) .*Secondary School Teaching Research Group Rulebook (Draft)*)

In 1950s, SBRPL in basic education played an important role. Its functions were to provide educational goals for teaching, to avoid the lack of lesson preparation, and to establish a logical sequence of teaching. (*Chinese Education Yearbook, 1949-1989*)

After the Cultural Revolution, SBRPL took a key role in developing normal schooling and improving teaching quality to a significant degree. (*Chinese Education Yearbook, 1949-1989*)

School-based research and professional learning (SBRPL) has been institutionalized over 50 years. SBRPL can provide opportunities for teachers to develop their professional knowledge in respond to their teaching contexts. (Li, X. W. (1994). The History of Basic Education in Shanghai(1949-1989) *Shanghai Education Express*,1994 , Vol. 55-60 , pps.181-200)

Nowadays, SBRPL plays a more significant role in the implementation of curriculum reform. It helps teachers to choose the most relevant teaching strategies which match students' needs, school culture and social conditions. As a result, teaching quality and teacher competency can be enhanced. Schools can also differentiate their curriculum and instructional practices which can cater various students' needs. (Ministry of Education (2003) , "Suggestions on improving and strengthening teaching research, as well as propelling new curriculum experience forward")

In 2002, Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences established a research team with Qing Pu Teacher College. After nine-month pilot study, we developed an in-service research and professional learning model for teachers entitled as "ACTION EDUCATION".

The core idea of "Action Education" is "lessons as the foundation, using teachers' professional knowledge to lead professional learning, and follow-up actions to improve teaching competency".

During this period, the research team arranged more than 100 seminars for teachers to learn from experience sharing and theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning. The team also conducted 30 interviews and 24 video record of classroom observation.

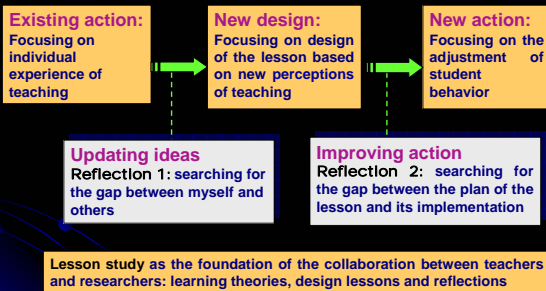
In *March 2003*, we applied the idea of "ACTION EDUCATION" into SBRPL. Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences expanded the study and invited **4 districts of Shanghai** to incorporate the idea of Action Education into their SBRPL. In this phrase, the research objective was to investigate the styles and functions of SBRPL. This study aimed at developing a strategic plan for teachers' professional development in school-based contexts.

This study involved 30 participating schools and 42 research partners from district teacher colleges and academic leaders in these schools. In *June 2004*, we expanded the project which included **329 schools** from **8 districts in Shanghai**.

- In **September 2004**, the project team hosted a conference which involved **84 SBRPL project "bases"** of prefectural and county level from 30 provinces. Professor Gu lingyuan was the project leader.
- At the **end of 2004**, Professor Gu presented the idea of 'Action Education' in the conference of International Conference Educational Teaching (ICET). This presentation aroused the international audiences' attention about the SBRPL in China.
- By the **end of 2005**, SBRPL was defined as a key working plan of the Ministry of Education in China in 2006.
- In **May 2007**, the key focus of the research project was teaching research — **Improving classroom teaching and learning.**

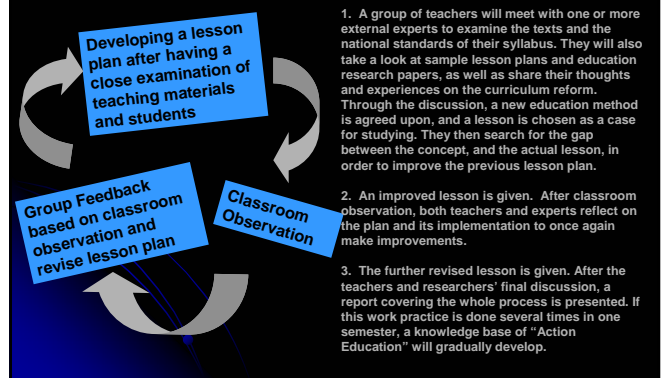


Action Education Based on Lesson Study



Three key elements : Self-reflection · Peer coaching · Professional guiding

The Incorporation of Action Education into SBRPL and its implementation



Multiple Forms in Implementation

1. Classification based on organizations:

- (1) Group learning
- (2) Leading group
- (3) VIP calls on
- (4) Cross-subject Teaching Research groups

2. Classification based on objectives:

- (1) Task driven
- (2) Project collaboration
- (3) Technique involved
- (4) School brand driven

3. Classification based on strategic plans:

- (1) Spiral improvement
- (2) Leading by pilot schools
- (3) District-based



In May 2007, the project team conducted a survey in one of the 84 SBRPL project bases in Shanghai. This survey aimed at understanding the current stage of SBRPL and its future development.

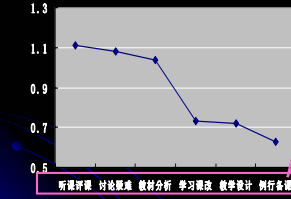
The data set of this survey is as follows:

- 1270 questionnaires to principals and teachers
- 446 individual interviews and 57 focus group interviews
- 99 school visits including 133 professional learning activities conducted in Teaching Research Groups

Findings of the Survey

Teachers concern about their practical teaching and student learning problems in their lessons.

Individual preference

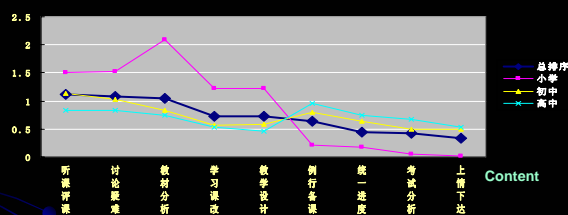


- Lesson observation and post lesson conferencing
- Problem discussion (e.g. difficult learning points, important learning points, key learning points)
- Teaching materials analysis
- Learning professional knowledge
- Lesson design
- Teaching schedule

→ lesson observation and post lesson conferencing / problem discussion / teaching materials analysis are three key concerns of SBRPL.

Elementary and secondary school teachers have different concerns

Individual preference

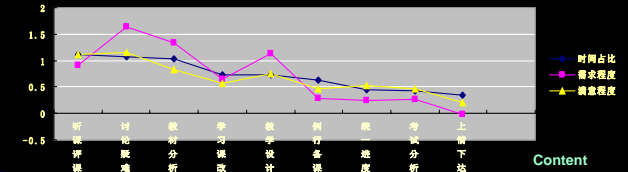


→ Elementary school teachers concern the following items: Lesson observation and post lesson conferencing/ problems discussion/ teaching materials analysis/ learning professional knowledge. All of these are closely related to the level of teaching competency.

→ Junior / senior school teachers concern the following items: Teaching schedule and analyzing examination papers. All of these are closely related to the examination results.

Discrepancy between actual arrangement of SBRPL and teachers' expectations on its effects

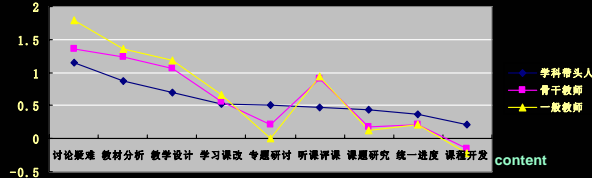
Individual Preference



- Teachers are satisfied with problem discussion and lesson design. All of them are the major part of SBRPL. However, this arrangement cannot fully meet teachers' needs.
- Teachers are not satisfied with the quality and time arrangement of the activity for teaching materials analysis. They feel that there is a gap between the actual arrangement of this activity and their needs.
- Teachers are satisfied with teaching schedule and analyzing examination papers. However, teachers do not urgently need these within the context of curriculum reform.

Teachers at different career stage have different needs

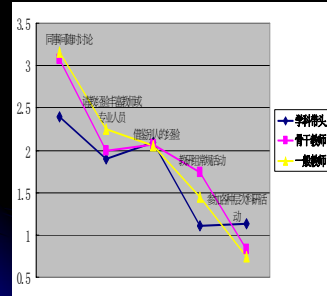
Individual Preference



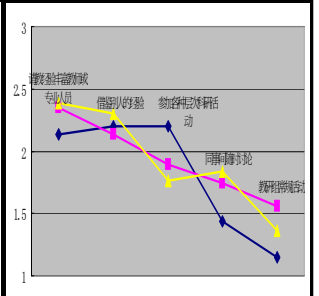
① Subject experts have strong demand on having seminars for the purpose of professional learning/ small scale action research / designing and developing school-based curriculum.

② Ordinary teachers and backbone teachers have strong demand on lesson observation and post lesson conferencing / lesson design / teaching materials analysis.

Informal discussion is a basic way for teachers to solve teaching



The ways adopted when teachers face their teaching problems



Teachers believe the most effective ways to improve their professional competency

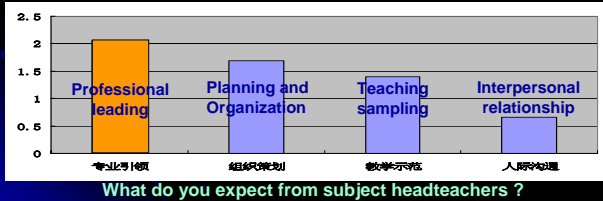
ordinary teachers backbone teachers subject experts

Subject headteachers play an important role in current curriculum reform

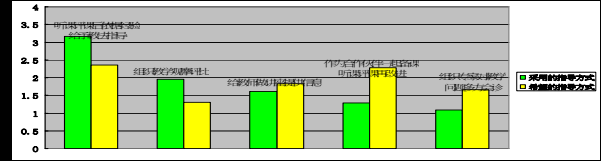
Within the context of curriculum reform, the professional role of subject headteachers has been recognized.

- 52.8% teachers believe "subject headteachers play a very important role in SBRPL",

Subject headteachers should take a special and leading role within the context of curriculum reform



Expectations on Teaching Research Officers have been clarified



the actual ways to guide & the expected ways to guide

- ① "Based on personal experience to give feedback in post lesson conferencing" is frequently used. However, teachers are not satisfied with knowing 'what' the problem is, but also knowing 'why' the problem is.
- ② "acting as partners and participating in lesson preparation, lesson observation and follow up actions" can help teachers to have an in-depth reflection on their teaching. Teachers feel this is the most effective way to improve their professional competency. However, it is not a common practice.
- ③ "Organizing Open Lessons and teaching competition" is a common ways to be employed. However, this is not teachers' favour.
- ④ "Arranging experts to diagnosis teaching problems" is a way less adopted. However, teachers have strong demand on this approach.

Conclusions:

1. SBRPL focuses on the issue of **teaching and learning within classroom contexts**.
2. **Peers are the basic and important power** to scaffold teachers' professional development.

Discussion and suggestions:

1. How to cultivate backbone teachers to lead professional development in group level?
2. How to maximize the functions of Teaching Research Group in order to promote good practices within the context of curriculum reform?
3. How can principals develop school ethos to promote teachers' learning?

Thank you !