

Teacher Learning with Classroom Assessment in Singapore Primary Schools

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Classroom assessment not only fosters student learning but also informs teacher professional learning.
- Teacher professional learning in the workplace can be strengthened and situated in concrete classroom assessment informing teacher decision-making.

BACKGROUND

Through decades of educational reforms, calls for strengthening the teaching workforce through workplace learning are now more pressing than ever as the global efforts to drive both educational quality and equity in the wake of the pandemic intensifies and society will need teachers with growing expertise at work. However, the paucity of attention to examine the specific interactions and dynamics of “inside teaching” as spaces for teacher professional learning is surprising. A relatively small number of research has emerged to scrutinize how daily classroom teaching practices, especially instructional activities involving attention, noticing, and assessing student learning,

constitute a space for the teacher learning when making decisions, persisting, interrupting, or changing in teaching practices (Janssen et al., 2014; Jiang & Hill, 2018; Jiang et al., 2020; Little, 2003; Mannikko & Husu, 2020). Our study follows this line of scholarship and examines the nature of the work teachers do as they carry out classroom assessment and respond to student work and how this, in turn, offers or limits the opportunities for teacher professional learning.

FOCUS OF STUDY

We examined how classroom assessment embedded in teaching provides a generative base for studying the opportunities for teachers to “interrupt” and re-examine their instructional routines. With different choices of interpreting and using what they could learn from the classroom assessment, teachers limit or create opportunities to learn in and from practices. We further argue that teachers can use the classroom assessment decision-making as an important springboard for professional learning to shift teachers’ habits of mind and learn what is innately crucial for teachers’ work.

KEY FINDINGS

We identified patterned differences in the way classroom assessment practices informed teachers to turn the decisions toward problematizing teaching in interaction or toward reinforcing teaching routines. In turning toward problematizing teaching, teachers treated the diagnosed problems in student learning as the starting point to further undelved student thinking and experiment with alternative teaching approaches to help students. Facing issues that surfaced via classroom assessment, the decisions toward reinforcing teaching limited teachers to resort to familiar precedents and repeat teaching with the expectation that the second round of teaching routine can clarify students' confusions. This reinforcing tended to obscure the in-depth relationships between the cues of problems encountered by students and the dilemmas of teaching (taught content, pedagogies, layered requirements from different stakeholders), while positioning the teacher as relatively helpless to choose alternatives in the face of circumstances beyond his or her control. To explicate these alternative decisions in relation to the classroom assessment and how they proffer opportunities for teacher learning, we delineate four choices teachers take—uni-directed, closed, open, and open-control—to reason through their classroom assessment that frame decisions deemed appropriate in teaching practices, which extend or delimit the opportunities they take up for professional growth.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

This analysis has implications both for further research on teacher professional learning and for practical initiatives to introduce the perspective of teacher learning in and from classroom assessment. It complements the assessment literacy area of practice in SkillsFuture for Educators (SFEd) and the SIMA model with the emphasis of mentoring and developing teacher expertise at workplace.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 81 teachers from 10 primary schools participated in Phase I and/or Phase II. Due to the disruption of school and attrition rate, 57 teachers completed seven sessions in Phase II (ESM) and were used for analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We had completed two phases of study, combining (i) qualitative observation/interview with laddering method to trace their decision-making and changes in decision-making via classroom assessment during the lesson and (ii) ESM survey with Qualtrics to track the changes in their classroom assessment and variations across groups of subject teachers with different years of experiences. Based on the initial analysis of qualitative observation and interview, we designed an ESM survey to record teachers' responses over 14 weeks.

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