

Intercultural collaborative lesson study between Japan and Germany

Intercultural
collaborative
lesson study

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Abstract

Purpose – The primary research question in this study concerns the establishment of a platform for intercultural collaborative lesson study, which promotes reciprocal dialogue between culturally distinctive educational research groups. Therefore, this study aims to introduce a case of intercultural collaborative lesson study projects between Hiroshima University and Leipzig University and to illustrate the issues in intercultural collaborative lesson study.

Design/methodology/approach – This study reconstructed the sequence of the project as a case under the narrative structure. Data were retrieved from a collaborative project between Hiroshima University and Leipzig University, which corresponds to the theoretical framework, as they represent a clear cultural contrast. The description of the project is reconstructed and reduced into a linear storyline of procedure.

Findings – This study identifies three key issues: (1) sharing data and culture, (2) visualising methodology and process, and (3) responding to research questions and answers.

Research limitations/implications – This platform does not require one cultural group neither throwing their own norms away nor creating an utterly new paradigm beyond their own cultures. It is a place “between” original places that enables groups to capture their own culture and another culture, which does not compel to change but effectively allows reflection and changing themselves.

Originality/value – Although several transcultural reports find that one cultural asset is imported and exported, the arena of bi-directional intercultural dialogue remains undeveloped. The collaborative project between Hiroshima and Leipzig is then introduced and examined to overcome the current problems in transnational lesson study.

Keywords Intercultural collaborative lesson study, Japanese lesson study (Jugyou Kenkyuu), Transnational lesson study project, Intercultural platform for lesson study

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1. Introduction

Transnational collaboration is now a major trend in the field of lesson study. Numerous researchers, practitioners and governmental agencies have reported various positive effects of lesson studies on the professional development of teachers, school management and contribution to educational research beyond national borders. [Stigler and Hiebert's \(1999\)](#) contribution is frequently identified as the very origin of the rapid spread of lesson study throughout the world, and it can be said to mark its transcending of national boundaries.

Although this transnational strategy has been understood as the key to expanding the influence of lesson study to the very edge of the world and by so doing, to prove its national

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border-free effectiveness, a closer examination of these efforts in the literature clarifies that those contributions fail to discuss the *bi-directional dialogical process of developing classroom teaching and teacher professionalism*, i.e. under the name of “transnational” exchange, these studies simply attempt to export a determinative kit or framework from one country to another. Considering this tendency as a critical problem in the expanding trend of lesson studies, this study presents a case study taken from an intercultural collaborative lesson study project between Hiroshima University (HU) in Japan and Leipzig University (LU) in Germany. This project exemplifies a different way of conducting intercultural collaborative lesson study, which does not commit to such a one-way transfer, but instead, strives to open a third place for promoting mutual dialogue.

Section 2 describes our theoretical framework on the need of intercultural perspective for creating a common platform. Section 3 presents the rationale of our data collection from Hiroshima and Leipzig and methodological reflection. Section 4 explains how the case project proceeded, and Section 5 synthesises the results from the project are synthesised into findings, elucidating a common step for the academic exploration of a lesson, under which different cultural and academic orientations can reside.

2. Theoretical framework: the need for intercultural perspective to create a common platform

Despite a huge number of trials to develop transnational collaborative research projects beyond national boundaries, a closer examination of these efforts reveals that such contributions are not eligible to be termed “transnational collaboratives” because they always introduce the struggles of importing a lesson study kit from one country to the other. In particular, in terms of transnational collaborative projects, Japanese lesson study (Jugyou Kenkyuu) frequently comes to mind, which reports the challenges, deviations and transformations in transferring Japanese cultural assets into another cultural context. For example, Fernandez *et al.* (2003) described a process in which a principal became accustomed to lesson study in Japan and then held lesson study in the USA. Another project reported that the Japanese classroom research method was implemented for professional development in science and mathematics in South Africa in collaboration with the University of Pretoria and the South African Department of Education, with funding support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (Jita *et al.*, 2008). Groves *et al.* (2016) identified the characteristics of Japanese lesson study and showed how it must be adapted to the Australian context, particularly in Australian mathematics, and problem-solving learning. This type of one-way transfer does not merely pertain to Japanese educational practices, but occurs in multiple contexts (cf. Lim-Ratnam *et al.*, 2019; Rappleye and Komatsu, 2017; Jetter and Hancock, 2012; Eraslan, 2008; Trent *et al.*, 2005); for example, Bartolini Bussi *et al.* (2017) report a project for the cultural transfer of a Chinese lesson study to Italy. Apart from transferring reports, other contributions have also compared and contrasted to compare and contrast lesson study practices between different national and cultural backgrounds (Zhang and Liu, 2018; Winsløw, 2012); however, the significance of and detailed path to developing a reciprocal collaborative research project remain unreported.

What, then, is the problem with such one-way transfer of lesson study concepts? It cannot be underestimated that transferring trials such as those described above have resulted in great developments in the teaching profession in many countries; however, educational development cannot repeat the same method of planting culturally inherent ideas in another cultural context. The development of lesson study has carefully avoided discussing “colonisation” in its related articles and discussions; however, the fact that several papers discuss “fidelity” to or “misconception” of Japanese lesson study indicates

structural similarities to colonisation (Chokshi and Fernandez, 2004; Fujii, 2014; Seleznyov, 2018).

The transnational collaborative lesson study project itself has maintained a significant meaning to improve dialogue and development for teacher professional development. However, theoretical reflection reveals a crucial need for establishing an *intercultural* collaborative lesson study. The transnational project is understood as a trial in which ideas from one country are transferred to and adopted in another country. However, the transnational framework has two problems: it does not reflect a sociocultural notion that “[t]he teacher is seen as always socially, culturally, and historically situated” (Russ *et al.*, 2016, p. 391). Educational phenomena are deeply grounded in culture or “larger system”, but political terminologies such as nation and state merely reduce cultural settings and mental constitutions within agents’ activities. Additionally, the transnational framework does not consider the effort of introducing a mediative third place. The binominal transaction that *transnational* supposes will always fail to provide insight into mediating different norms. As Tröhler critically emphasises, the “transnational process” accelerates and expands “homogenization and standardization” (Tröhler, 2011, p. 185; Pinar, 2014, p. 12). The latter is also regarded as logic with the danger of generating “colonisation” of culture, for the mode of transnational “here or there” has to plunge one to “dualism”, which excludes an alternative place (Wang, 2014, p. 68).

Instead of a transnational framework, the intercultural framework will play an alternative role, as it prioritizes the *cultural* difference and distinctiveness to facilitate cultural exchange and “acknowledge the “in between” fluid place” (Wang, 2014, p. 72; see also Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011, p. 210). In this third place “multiplicity and differences are neither excluded nor self-constrained”, rather it promotes interactive dynamics that any cultural entities can freely enter and leave and generates the “transformation of both locality and globalness” (Wang, 2014, p. 73). Finally, this place would prepare a common procedure to negotiate, reflect on differences, minimise conflict and smoothen dialogue (cf. Roofe and Bezzina, 2018). Given such advantages, the development of an intercultural platform for lesson study should be explored. Therefore, the primary research question in this study is: how can a platform for intercultural collaborative lesson study, which promotes reciprocal dialogue between culturally distinctive educational research groups, be established? To this end, this study aims to introduce a case study of intercultural collaborative lesson study projects between HU and LU and to describe common phases with issues for intercultural collaborative lesson study.

3. Rationale for the case from Hiroshima and Leipzig as the culturally distinctive partners

The selection of two countries, Japan and Germany, suffices for the purpose of this study because these two countries hold clearly opposite orientations in the discourse of educational research.

3.1 *Jugyou Kenkyuu and Unterrichtsforschung: developmental or descriptive, normative or empirical*

Lesson study in Japan (*Jugyou Kenkyuu*) is a norm-oriented developmental framework of teaching practice. Already in the Meiji era (1868–1912), teachers were assigned to develop their skills to teach as part of their professionalism. The lesson study cycle, which was reconstructed by Lewis and Hurd, consists of (1) study curriculum and formulate goals, (2) plan, (3) conduct research lesson and (4) reflect (Lewis and Hurd, 2011, p. 2). Lesson study deals with *the normative assertion of changing and improving teaching practices in the classroom*. The developmental character in Japanese educational research has been recently understood as a “normative approach”, which explores the values of education, focusing on

what should be realised and as the “practical approach” that strives to create a better state of humans and society (cf. Matsushita *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). The methodology and methods for analysing research lessons are determined by the habitual procedures of every research group, which are supposed to have a certain understanding of what the lesson should be. Practice and research are deeply connected through the process of lesson study, as this tradition does not hesitate to consider the teacher as an independent educational researcher.

The developmental orientation in *Jugyou Kennkyuu* possesses, on the other hand, a weakness in its fragile foundation of empirical methodologies: feedback must be given right after the practice, without plenty of time to ponder, and the mode of discussion is often (not necessarily always) not between academic and non-academic manner, but effective or ineffective. All those orientations quite often sacrifice the well-designed qualitative research methodologies with empirically and scientifically well-designed ones. This is because the research methodology is largely determined by conventional and habitual procedures of every research group, which is supposed to have a certain understanding of the lesson. In response to such situations, there have been many attempts to promote scientific design for qualitative research in the classroom (cf. Akita and Fujie, 2019), which might explain the current desire of Japanese *Jugyou Kenkyuu* to be scientific and empirical.

In Germany, research on lessons has been conducted in a completely different manner. Since receiving the research paradigm from Gage (1963) in 1970 (cf. Ingenkamps and Prey, 1970–1971), German didactics has developed its unique tradition of “Unterrichtsforschung” (research on teaching). The mainstream of *Unterrichtsforschung* in Germany has shifted from quantitative to qualitative since approximately 2010. For example, Gruschka (2018) uses “objective hermeneutics” as a methodology of sociology to explore *the pedagogical meaning* of lessons. In addition, qualitative *Unterrichtsforschung* has been conducted using the sociological methodologies of ethnography and discourse analysis. *The Unterrichtsforschung in Germany, be it quantitative or qualitative classroom research, has a strong social scientific character, and it has been conducted as educational research that emphasises scientific analysis over teacher education* (cf. Rabenstein and Proske, 2018).

However, the empirical research practice does not unnecessarily respond to the needs of school teachers and students in pre-service education. In Germany, researchers barely visit school to discuss with teachers. Research findings are not meant to help draw practical implications, but to describe classroom phenomena. By encountering new paradigms in global settings, the absence of practical orientation has gradually evolved through academic discourse in Germany. Despite the minimal number of cases, attempts at lesson study can be found in Germany. A pioneer in this regard is Kullmann (2012), who introduced Japanese classroom research to develop classroom teaching.

3.2 Hiroshima University and Leipzig University in reciprocity

A clear contrast in the culture of research on lessons between Japan and Germany is now evident. The former culture understands educational research as the process of developing lessons, while the latter focuses on the empirical study of classroom teaching and hesitates to discuss normative assertions on the observed lesson. The contrast between the normative and descriptive or developmental and empirical research orientation in two countries comes to a crucial split where the reciprocal communication will possibly grow.

The targeted research groups, HU and LU, reflect this contrast in their orientation. HU emphasises the developmental aspect of lesson study, in which they discuss with teachers, encourage them to study and keep in touch with them. By contrast, LU prepares faculty for attaining a variety of methodologies for use in empirical teaching research. Both groups reflected in advance on the contrast between Japan and Germany or HU and LU, and each understood what they might encounter in the other group.

This difference in orientation became beneficial when they conceived their orientation as the strength that could be shared and presented to the other group, as well as it being a challenge for both sides to overcome misunderstandings and “irritation” with each other. The collaborative lesson study was not an easy job, as every method and data collection process differed between the two groups: those who have undertaken lesson analysis using lesson data will soon understand the difficulties that arose, when, for example, the Hiroshima group was unable to acquire a sufficient dataset from the lessons processed by Leipzig, while the Leipzig group was troubled by the transcript prepared by the Hiroshima group. Beyond these difficulties, collaborative research in the two university teams sought common ground for holding lesson study/research on classroom teaching and learning, namely, this collaborative research settled its purpose on the “intercultural” platform, where two culturally distinctive groups can pursue three objectives: *to reflect through encounter, to transform themselves and to facilitate a more intensive dialogue beyond the boundary of cultures.*

Consequently, the collaborative research project between Hiroshima and Leipzig assigned themselves first to understanding each other’s culture, and then to reflecting on their own culture, and finally, to overcoming the boundary between the two cultures by formulating a common platform for holding lesson study/research on teaching. This assigned process is understood as a process of intercultural dialogue for lesson study rather than transnational dialogue.

3.3 Methodological reflection

This paper originally proceeded under the developmental mindset of research reflection, which made it difficult to rationalise everything happening in the project. However, it is not difficult to reconstruct the sequence of this project as a case, primarily because various documents and reports are available for analysis, and, more importantly, because HU and LU had emphatically agreed not to fall into a colonial relationship of import–export but to stimulate each other towards a reciprocal relationship, where the concept of interculturality can reside. Under this concept of interculturality and willingness to develop a new platform of academic communication, a case study would be a suitable methodology. As [Simon \(2009\)](#) states, the case study is “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project” (p. 21). This requires presenting an exemplary case with a concept underlying and explicating the case ([Denzin and Lincoln, 2017](#)). This project between HU and LU has already had a concept of interculturality as a strong motive to move the project forward and had explained how the case project could represent to explore this concept in the aforementioned reasoning.

The case study then needs to apply the “narrative structure” in a written story form, which requires “clearly structured, well written, and contain[ing] only the detail that is necessary to give readers” ([Simon, 2014](#), p. 464). Therefore, the description of the project is reconstructed and reduced into the linear storyline of the project’s procedure.

4. Case study on an intercultural collaborative lesson study project between Hiroshima University and Leipzig University

4.1 Background information of the project

Based on the international exchange agreements concluded between HU graduate school of education and LU faculty of education, the laboratory of educational methodology and laboratory of general pedagogy commenced its joint research in 2016. The main theme of our joint research is individualisation and collaboration in the classroom. Recent years have seen the progress of the individualisation of lessons in Germany and the collectivisation of lessons in Japan.

Since 2016, members of each group have continued to visit each other for collaborative research (five times from Japan to Germany and four times from Germany to Japan). To date,

we have publicised the results of our joint research by holding research meetings at each other's university, giving three academic conference presentations and publishing a book. The joint research method is to visit schools conducting collaborative research with our laboratory and analyse the observed lessons collaboratively three times: November 2016 in A elementary in Hiroshima observing a science lesson. One researcher was invited, HU made transcripts and both sides shared the material to analyse it in their own ways.

Second, a lesson at B high school in Leipzig was observed by a member of LU in October 2016. LU first produced the transcript of the lesson in German before translating it into English to share with Japan. LU conducted the lesson analysis using German transcripts, while HU did the same using English transcripts. However, the Japanese side lacked some information about the classes necessary to analyse the lesson; therefore, we requested some additional data. In the course of the analysis, the Japanese side asked the German teacher some questions and analysed the lessons based on the teacher's responses. The results of that analysis were presented at WALs 2018 and at a workshop with LU, which was held at WALs 2019.

Third, we together visited an English lesson at C high school in Hiroshima in November 2018. At this time, four researchers from LU came to Japan. They documented the lesson in their own way and transcribed it. The principal researcher from HU stayed at LU as a visiting researcher and was continuously involved in this lesson analysis.

Figure 1 shows how the collaborative lesson studies were conducted. Throughout the whole process of this collaboration, it became evident that routine work had been established, consisting of documentation, transcription, analysis and feedback. By following this generated procedure, HU and LU created a common place that overarches the culturally distinctive groups. The next two sections will clarify those four steps as the outcomes of the collaborative project: first, tasks and assignments for cultural dialogue in these four phases are articulated, and then, the key functional moments between those four phases that manoeuvre "inter"-action are explained.

4.2 Outcome: four phases of intercultural collaboration

4.2.1 Documentation. Since the TIMSS Video Study, we have recognised the importance of lesson analysis based on lesson video recordings. Lesson videos are often used in teacher education (Chikiwa and Graven, 2019), and lesson video archives have been established (e.g. Stigler, 2020). Detailed knowledge of applying the recorded videos to teacher education has been accumulated. However, how and where to record lesson videos has never been the focus in the research field of lesson study. In this collaborative project, videos were recorded from the front and back of the classroom, and additional videos were recorded as necessary to record the lesson (e.g. focusing on students' discussion).

By observing the lesson, we recorded it using field notes, with the notation style used depending on the lesson observer. Documentations in field notes complements the detailed transcripts. Furthermore, related documents (photo of the blackboard, seating chart, students' worksheets and so on) will help produce detailed transcripts.

In this collaborative project, both universities provided two directions – videos. HU also provided photos of the blackboard and mini-blackboards of the students' group in A elementary school; students' worksheets, and IC recorder-recorded audio dates in C high school; and lesson plan and seating chart, as shown, in both cases. Neither university provided field notes.

4.2.2 Transcription. Lesson analysis was conducted based upon the documented data, and the text data, particularly the transcript, played the biggest role in the analysis. This collaborative project also followed the basic procedure of the transcriptions that both universities produced and shared based on the lesson video. An example retrieved from an

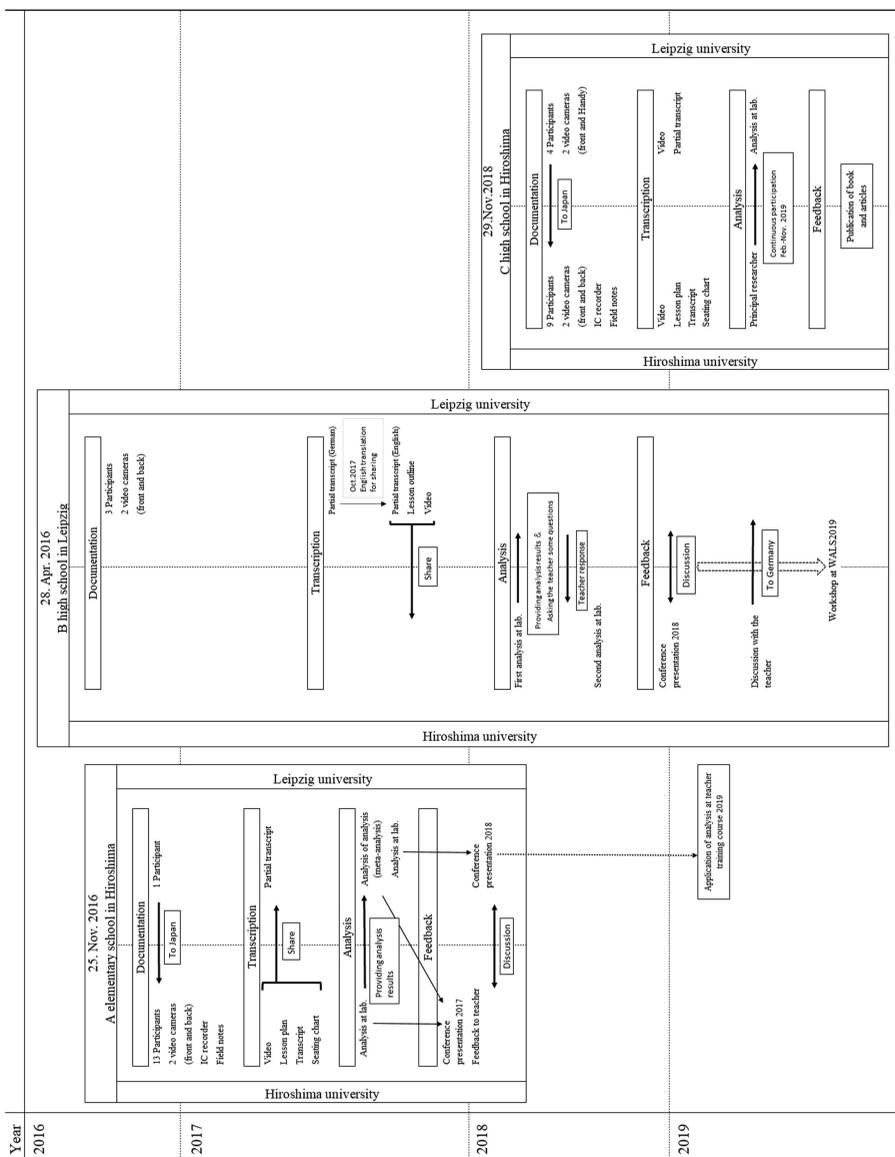


Figure 1. Development of the collaborative project through three lesson analyses

English class at C high school in Hiroshima is shown in Figure 2, while another transcript from B high school in Leipzig is shown in Figure 3.

The form of transcription was determined by the research question and methodological framework provided by the respective lesson study groups. HU's research focus for lesson study was fixed on students' group learning and regarded the interactions between teacher and students, or teaching and learning, as the target. Based on this assumption, methodological reflection adopts a framework in which teaching practice and learning activity are placed against each other, and this bi-directional interaction becomes the point of enquiry. The transcript in Figure 2 has two vertical columns consisting of T(eacher action) and C(children action).

By contrast, LU's methodology is grounded in sociological methodology, specifically videography (Dinkelaker and Herrle, 2009). This group adopted the videographical approach,

Figure 2.
Transcription of
English lesson in C
high school

	T 50	(the timer rings) <u>So many of you are working hard. We shall take a few more minutes.</u>	C 170	g1	(indi.) (showing her notebook to b1)
	T 51	(to b1) what's happening?	C 171	b1	(nodding to g1)
	T 52	<u>okay, uh, blue or green, yes, like I want to know more about this person or this was a great experience or surprising events or something happened.</u>	C 172	b1	<u>how do I make here?</u>
	T 53	ou, the impression of the essay like book report.	C 173	b1	<u>oh is that the place of such thing?</u>
	T 54	letter to writer, so you should mention about what she wrote on the paper.	C 174	b1	<u>ahh, (nodding, tilting his head to one side, and grinning.)</u>
	T 55	(standing at side of b1 and pointing at a paper) like you thought this is great or that is impressive and so on. (apart from b1, up to the front)	C 175	b1	<u>... Y.E.S. (tilt his head to one side)</u>
36:57	T 56	<u>so, just for this lesson, it's okay what you could have done, one more minute, I will give you one more mintue, one more minute.</u>	C 176	b1	(looking at the board)

Figure 3.
Transcription of
German lesson in B
high school

22	T	now I capture this in that way (writes on blackboard) (s5 raises hand) it might be\ (points to s5)
23	S5	but he is somehow such a little intriguer if one sees- well just leicester\
24	T	well leicester stands for utilitarianism for that for the intrigue - (3s) (writes on blackboard) if you want it that way it should be now\
25	S4	(to s3) well done\
26	T	is it enough for leicester/
27	S6	yes\
28	T	then the other two\ (s3 and s4 raise hands, T picks s3)
29	S3	well shrewsbury probably for wisdom and-
30	S4	supporter\ (uses english term)
31	T	(writes on blackboard) are there any further remarks or other suggestions for shrewsbury/ or does wisdom sweep you all off off [the court] here and now- (s3 raises hand, T picks s3)

in which a lesson video is played with muted audio to allow researchers to concentrate on the visible process. The sequence, which generally comprises several moments of change in person and material, is divided into small segments, which are then meticulously analysed. While Hiroshima conventionally prepares all transcriptions from beginning to end, Leipzig does not do so, but instead, transcribes several segments that are selected in advance. The transcript produced by LU consists of a single line in which voices are arranged sequentially without any manipulation (Figure 3).

Both universities transcribe every single voice spoken throughout the video recording. No words, including grammatical errors, are rectified to coincide with the spoken words and words on the transcript. Non-verbal actions are also recorded in the transcripts in parentheses.

The language in the transcripts plays an important role in the collaborative project. Both universities produced transcriptions in their native languages. The English spoken in Japanese lessons was transcribed alphabetically, while Japanese dialect was written in Japanese characters immediately after the English words. Collaborative projects need to be translated, and this remained problematic throughout the entire project. Each university prepared common-language transcriptions in English. Some researchers at both universities could understand German and Japanese, and they attempted to facilitate understanding and explanation.

4.2.3 Analysis. In the collaborative study process, “lesson analysis” was closely tied to the lesson study cycle. Both groups shared the basic understanding that analysis cannot be conducted apart from documentation and transcription. Tying the process as a whole is significant in making the analysis relevant to teachers and research groups.

The lesson study at C high school in Hiroshima began with making a lesson plan with teacher I. The objectives and targeted competencies in the lesson plan were settled through cooperation between C high school and HU for four years. This long-standing cooperation allowed the Hiroshima group to easily request additional data or interviews. Lesson construction by B high school, including deciding on the objective, materials and teaching plan, was prepared independently from LU, and this did not allow either Leipzig or Hiroshima to gain further details. These different procedures required both universities to slightly change their data collection methods. Hiroshima usually prepares as much data as possible, while Leipzig only requests limited data. LU, on the other hand, usually acquires only one or two video records and a transcript, which were insufficient for the Hiroshima group, which resulted in HU requesting a discussion with teacher K on how she had constructed her lesson (“how did she understand the content to be taught and plan the lesson?”, “Did the lesson go along with your intention?” and so on). Therefore, analysis in collaborative study must be closely connected to the whole process of the lesson study cycle from documentation and transcription.

The analysis by LU followed a heuristic process in which the research questions emanating from viewing the video and discussion determined the topic of focus. LU analysed the English class at C high school and heuristically discovered that this lesson featured four unique themes of “re-addressing”, “norm, expectation, and updated values”, “teaching and learning”, and “artefacts and spatial organisation”. These four key themes were further analysed as the core attributes of the lesson. Another example explains LU’s videography, which focused on the teacher’s role and positioning in the classroom for the science class at A elementary school in Hiroshima and analysed how speech and posture influence students in acquiring learning content.

The Hiroshima group extracted the structure of the interaction. To develop the structural model, they attempted to categorise all 323 teachers’ speeches in the lesson into five teaching functions, which were established through a combination of the theoretically grounded and heuristic approaches. The HU group found the coupling and relative functioning of five

categories (confirmation, direction, explanation, question and evaluation) that teacher K activated. The Hiroshima group understood that this category provoked students into varying modes of action and thinking; at this point, the Hiroshima group understood the interactive nature of the lesson.

While the approach and analytical process may vary, two commonalities could be articulated. First, both universities adopted an *interpretative qualitative approach* that possibly allowed less friction and conflict in sharing data and engaging in discussion. Second, both universities certainly sought a scientific analysis that would hopefully bring about a sharable conclusion. In the three lessons from Hiroshima and Leipzig, the topics all converged on “thinking community”.

4.2.4 Feedback. As educational research and educational practice have finally reached the feedback stage, feedback here includes a broad arena of outputting research results to society. This could either comprise the publication of academic progress or practical feedback to teachers and schools. This collaborative project marked three types of achievement: publication of articles and journals, feedback to teachers and connection to teacher education.

First, publication took multiple forms, including both academic and practical. Academic feedback deals with academic papers, journals and books in the domestic and international fields, while practical feedback is writing reports or results of analysis in the school bulletin.

Second, feedback to teachers took place throughout this collaborative project, for teacher I at C high school and teacher N at A elementary school in Hiroshima, who are both well accustomed with the conventional lesson study cycle. This collaborative project is significant in providing opportunities to talk and develop a standing connection with teacher K at B high school in Leipzig. The results of analysis from both universities were conveyed to teacher K, and the academic conference in Amsterdam offered her the opportunity to express her thoughts and reflections on that feedback. As this feedback is utterly new in the German context, the Amsterdam conference also comprised the feedback and contribution in the academic context of educational research in Germany.

Third, the contribution to teacher education is a crucial achievement of the collaborative project. The analytical process always involved undergraduate and graduate students to foster their insights on lesson and lesson study. The heads of both HU and LU held several lectures and seminars, giving students the opportunity to conduct mock-lesson study and lesson analysis in their respective methodologies. LU used cases from HU and vice versa, to nurture comparative thoughts and reflections on students’ own teaching methods.

5. Findings: key issues that promote intercultural dialogue

The intercultural collaborative lesson study project proposed a platform to proceed with the lesson study by bringing perspectives and methodologies from each group under four phases: documentation, transcription, analysis and feedback.

Documentation: Both universities recorded lessons with more than two videos and prepared a transcript, while methodological strategies such as the use of field notes, small audio recorders and collection of additional data varied depending on each group’s aim and research questions.

Transcription: Some structural differences were found in the form of transcripts, but Hiroshima and Leipzig shared the idea that transcripts must contain the voice and action of teachers and learners. As for the transcultural project, a common language, in this case English, was helpful in understanding lessons in different cultures.

Analysis: The perspectives and methods differed with the research question each group asked by. Notably, the results of analysis tended not to severely contradict each other, though such a possible conflict of interpretation would not be problematic.

Feedback: Diverse orientations with multiple layers for providing feedback are prepared in the process of a collaborative project. Feedback is sent to teachers, schools, undergraduate students, graduate students and academic groups in the forms of publication, communication and education.

Table 1 describes the contrasting procedure between HU and LU. The fundamental resemblance lies in the procedure, whereby both universities followed the four phases.

What might then make this intercultural research communication possible despite a great gap in orientation and academic culture between HU and LU? This is the focal point of the primary research question of this study holds regarding establishing a common platform for intercultural collaborative lesson study. Based on the four phases summarised in Table 1, this collaborative project has found that there are three key issues or discussion points, particularly those key issues “between” each phase (Table 2).

5.1 Sharing data and culture

Documentation ends with producing the transcriptions, when the method of data sharing and cultural mutual understanding play an important role. For example, speech and actions that are deeply rooted in Japanese and German culture were translated into English. This process required each group to interpret and reconstruct their own culture of teaching and classroom

	Hiroshima, Japan	Leipzig, Germany
Documentation	2 Videos, IC Recorder, etc. Get involved in classroom	2 videos Distance oneself from classroom
Transcription	Speech, action Interactional structure	Speech, action, time lag Sequential structure
Analysis	Interpretative structure of interaction	Interpretative videography
Feedback	Academic < Practical	Academic > Practical

Table 1.
Commonalities, differences in the four phases

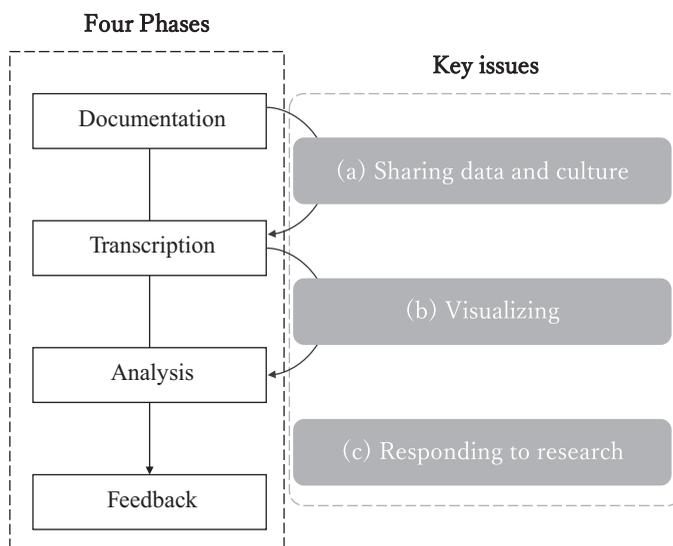


Table 2.
Key issues for proceeding dialogue on the intercultural platform

behind the words to relate it to the other group. English plays an important role not as the dominant vernacular of global society, but as a third language that can relativise the dominant story, presumption and pre-judgement that the original language might have. Sharing an understanding of cultural background through a common language enabled both sides to move away from their own original cultures and shift to a common in between fluid place where intercultural dialogue was promoted. Neither side attempted to sell or persuade the other of their own cultural understanding as the primary task, but instead attempted to open an arena for observing the two cultures from a third place. Such preparatory dialogue on the issue of differences in basic assumptions then allowed the project to move forward to the preparation of analysis (transcription).

5.2 Visualising methodology and process

Once the transcript had been produced, visualising the methodologies and analytical process guided both groups to an intercultural arena where their respective analyses were distinctive, or at least to an understanding that their own analysis was distinctive. These key issues did not require them to reach a shared conclusion on the analysis, but sought to clarify the characteristics of the respective cultures through the reflecting mirror of another cultural group. In the analytic process, the intercultural arena reflects on oneself by visualising methodologies and the research process and presenting them to the counterpart. Presentation is followed by tense questioning from the counterpart that helps both sides understand of the significance and challenges of one's own perspective and stances.

5.3 Responding to research questions and answers

As long as the project remains within the foundation of conventional lesson study, it is necessary to take the feedback stage into consideration; however, at a very early stage, it is recognised that there is a different academic culture in Germany, apart from developmental lesson study. As repeatedly emphasised, this collaborative project never sought, under the terms of transfer or import, to calmly invade counterparts to change their mentality or culture through oppressive persuasion. Instead, the project decided to take "feedback" in a much broader sense, which includes academic contribution and practical development. Therefore, returning to answer the research question will be the key issue for shifting from the analytical stage to feedback: the collaboratively produced result of analysis must be returned to an adequate place where results are welcomed for audit. In other words, the determinant for connecting analysis and feedback is to consider where the result of analysis is addressed.

In summary, the four phases illustrate the procedure of intercultural collaborative lesson study, namely, how to ensure that progress is made in collaboration. These four phases have inevitable key issues. By discussing the three issues, culturally distinctive groups could reciprocally stimulate to bring themselves to self-reflective and counter-reflective thinking.

6. Conclusion

This study proposed a method to establish a platform of intercultural collaborative lesson study by introducing and examining a case project between Hiroshima and Leipzig. While several previous reports have described how one cultural asset is imported and exported, the arena of intercultural dialogue remains undeveloped. To bridge this gap, this collaborative project between Hiroshima and Leipzig was introduced and examined as a way to overcome the current problems of transnational lesson study.

This study demonstrated the flow of the intercultural collaborative project in four phases. By reconstructing the entire process into four phases, it found three key issues for proceeding the project forward. These are placed between four phases a common platform as a third

place, where participants can observe their own culture and encounter another culture. This platform does not require either cultural group to either discard their own norms away or create an utterly new paradigm beyond their own cultures. It is utterly opposite, in that this intercultural place lies “between” original places that enables groups to capture their own culture and the other culture, which does not compel change but remains effective in opening a door to reflection and changing themselves. The interculturality is important in overcoming a one-way transfer-styled collaboration. As both HU and LU did not have to alter their grounding theories but enjoy transformation through encountering, conflict and negotiating mutually on the shared sequence of platform, the interculturality, therefore, proposes an alternative framework to a cultural colonialism with one cultural story.

To conclude, this proposal for intercultural collaborative study is rightfully positioned in the field of educational research, where we can hear a call for mutual understanding and overcoming cultural colonialism. A common platform for promoting collaborative studies is more necessary than ever. To progress further in multi-cultural dialogue, as the first phase of action for every country and every lesson group, this study forecasts that it will be beneficial to launch an electronic archive on the internet, where documentation can easily be accessed.

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