



## LESSON STUDY REPORT

# UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF FOREGROUND, MIDDLE GROUND AND BACKGROUND IN AN ARTWORK

James Calleja & Laura Formosa

April 2020



L-Università ta' Malta  
Faculty of Education

  
Collaborative Lesson Study Malta



© CLeStuM 2020

[www.clestum.eu](http://www.clestum.eu)

***Collaborative Lesson Study Malta (CLEStuM) publication***

Written and compiled by James Calleja and Laura Formosa

Reviewed by Michelle Attard Tonna and Michael A. Buhagiar

Published April 2020

*This report is intended to disseminate lesson study as a model for teacher professional development and to provide educators with a resource tool about how a lesson study may be conducted.*

To cite this report:

Calleja, J., & Formosa, L. (2020). *Understanding the Use of Foreground, Middle Ground and Background in an Artwork: A Lesson Study Report*. Malta: CLeStuM, Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

**Disclaimer:**

*The copyright owner would like to inform that educators, schools and other non-commercial and non-profit entities may reproduce any material from this report or use it in any form or by any means without seeking written permissions from the authors, but on the condition that the source is cited.*



Members of the academic staff at the Faculty of Education (University of Malta) contributed towards the success of this lesson study initiative.



## Table of Contents

Foreword .....	5
Rationale .....	6
Lesson Study Cycle .....	7
<i>Implementing the lesson study cycle</i> .....	8
Lesson Study Community .....	9
<i>Working as a professional learning community</i> .....	10
<i>Key stages in the lesson study process</i> .....	12
<i>Lesson study meetings</i> .....	14
Lesson Plan .....	16
<i>Lesson overview</i> .....	17
<i>Lesson title</i> .....	18
<i>Class</i> .....	18
<i>Lesson dates</i> .....	18
<i>Lesson time and duration</i> .....	18
<i>Lesson focus</i> .....	18
<i>Learning outcomes</i> .....	18
<i>Resources</i> .....	19
<i>Activity 1</i> .....	20
<i>Activity 2</i> .....	24
<i>Activity 3</i> .....	24
<i>Activity 4</i> .....	26
<i>Activity 5</i> .....	27
Lesson Observation Sheet .....	28
<i>Looking for the evidence</i> .....	29
Lesson in Pictures .....	30
<i>Pictures tell a thousand stories</i> .....	31
Data Collected .....	36
<i>Samples of the evidence collected by observers</i> .....	37

Post-lesson Discussion Feedback .....	40
<i>Trial 1</i> .....	41
<i>Trial 2</i> .....	42
Student Feedback .....	43
<i>Student feedback sheet</i> .....	44
<i>Samples of feedback collected from students</i> .....	45
<i>Analysis of students' feedback</i> .....	46
Reflections .....	48
<i>Reflections of observers</i> .....	49
<i>The teacher's reflection</i> .....	52
<i>The lesson study facilitator's reflection</i> .....	54
Lesson Study Insights .....	55
<i>The main insights</i> .....	56
<i>Suggestions for the future</i> .....	57
<i>Dissemination</i> .....	58
<i>Final conclusions and insights gained</i> .....	59
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	60
<i>References</i> .....	61

## Foreword

Lesson study is an ongoing professional learning model widely used in Japan. It is often attributed as an important tool for the improvement of teaching (Huang, Takahashi & Ponte, 2019). In a lesson study teachers work together to identify learning goals for student development and, consequently, engage in ongoing cycles to study, plan, teach and observe, and evaluate the lesson.

In Malta, lesson study was first introduced with a group of mathematics teachers in 2017. Their lesson study, which focused on making mathematical connections, was carried out at St Clare College Secondary School (Pembroke) and a report was then published in July 2017 (see Calleja, 2017). A copy of this report (available for download at [www.clestum.eu](http://www.clestum.eu)) was disseminated in all Maltese secondary schools. Since then, **Collaborative Lesson Study Malta (CLeStuM)** was set up. The idea behind this project is to support schools to learn about, initiate and sustain collaborative lesson studies. So far, **CLeStuM** has worked with eight primary and secondary schools.

Doing a lesson study goes beyond planning a detailed lesson, yet the process involved is hardly visible and documented (Fujii, 2016). In this report, we document the work involved within our lesson study process so that others (teacher educators, school leaders, Heads of Department and teachers) may familiarize themselves with the process, use it and build upon it. This report focuses on the lesson study process that involved an **eight-week ongoing collaboration** between the Art teacher (Laura) and the **CLeStuM** team leader (James) acting as a lesson study facilitator. In this lesson study, James supported Laura to enable and assist her with the lesson study process. Knowledgeable others were also involved to provide feedback, at the planning stage and following the teaching of the lesson. The Art lesson study was planned for a group of 12 boys in Grade 4 (aged 8 years) and focused on students' understanding of the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background and their application in an artwork.

In this report, we focus on providing details about each step of our lesson study. We include aspects related to the lesson study cycle, the lesson study process, the lesson plan, the observation sheet used to collect data about student learning, details about the outcomes from the post-lesson discussions, observers' reflections, students' feedback about their experience and other insights drawn from our experience participating in this lesson study. We also offer suggestions for further work.

**James Calleja**  
*Lesson study facilitator*  
**CLeStuM**

**Laura Formosa**  
*Art teacher*  
**Stella Maris College Junior School**

# Understanding the Use of Foreground, Middle Ground and Background in an Artwork

## Rationale

For primary school students, particularly those in Grade 4, making good use of space in an artwork tends to be a complex task. Usually, students focus on using one area of their drawing paper, very often putting the main object that they want to draw in the centre of their paper, leaving the rest of the page empty. Then there are those who struggle to put their object against a background, thus concentrating only on their object as if it is placed in a vacuum. Moreover, some students do not always manage to understand how objects tend to change their apparent size when placed at varying distances from the viewer's position. In other words, when an object moves away from the viewer, it tends to look smaller and when it moves closer to the viewer, it tends to look bigger. As a result, students end up ignoring the proportion of the object and instead draw objects that are either too small or too big.

Although, at the age of eight one would not expect students to know certain complex and technical art vocabulary, it is essential for Grade 4 students to know about the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background. In particular, students need to appreciate how these are portrayed in images (both in photography and in paintings); how artists play with these levels in their creations to make good use of space; how objects may overlap other objects in the different grounds; how size and colour of objects vary on each ground; and how the use of such concepts make an artwork look more complete.

For these reasons, this lesson study sought to provide Grade 4 students an opportunity to observe, think critically and discuss how foreground, middle ground and background are used in images. Students also experimented and applied these concepts while creating their own collage artwork. Hence, this lesson study focused on supporting students' understanding of foreground, middle ground and background in images and how they may apply these concepts in creating their own artwork.

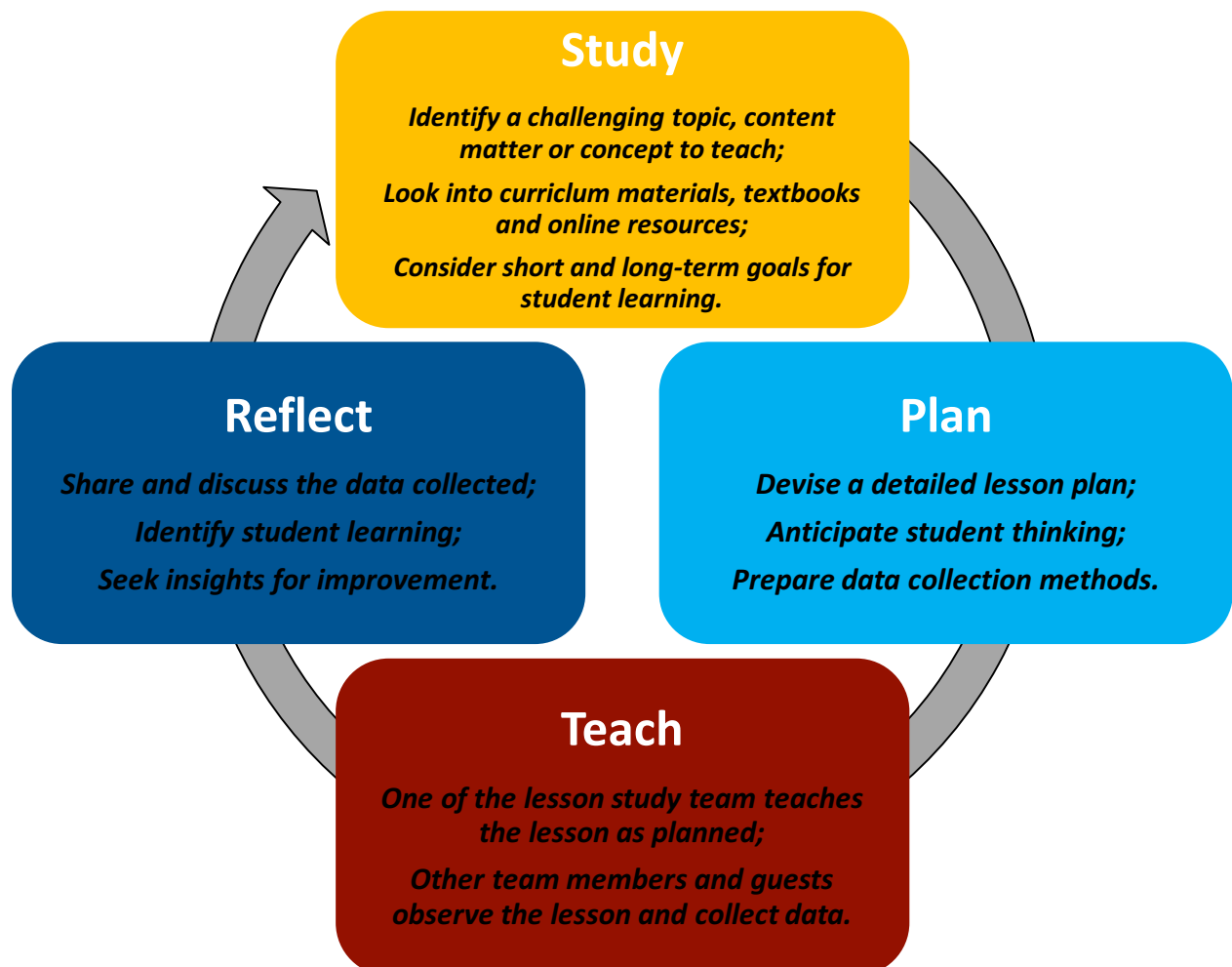
# LESSON STUDY CYCLE



## Implementing the lesson study cycle

The lesson study cycle usually involves four key phases: **study**, **plan**, **teach** and **reflect**. This cycle may include **more than one iteration** depending on the aim of the lesson study, the period of time during which the lesson study is being implemented and the resources available.

It is important to point out that the **teach** phase represents the lesson trial while the **reflect** phase incorporates the post-lesson discussion session.



# LESSON STUDY COMMUNITY

## Working as a professional learning community

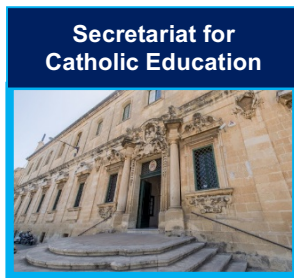
This lesson study was initiated through an invitation launched by **CLeStuM** to which Laura responded. Over the course of the lesson study, James and Laura identified participants who could support them in building the lesson study learning community.

Laura worked on this lesson study with the Grade 4 class teacher and two learning support educators. However, acknowledging the importance of school support, a member of the school leadership team was also involved. We also invited a PD leader from the Secretariat for Catholic Education to observe the lesson and provide us with feedback in the post-lesson discussion.



**Stella Maris College  
Junior School**

<b>Laura</b>	Art teacher
<b>Noel</b>	Head of School
<b>Christine</b>	Class teacher
<b>Elvia &amp; Stephanie</b>	Learning Support Educators



**Secretariat for  
Catholic Education**

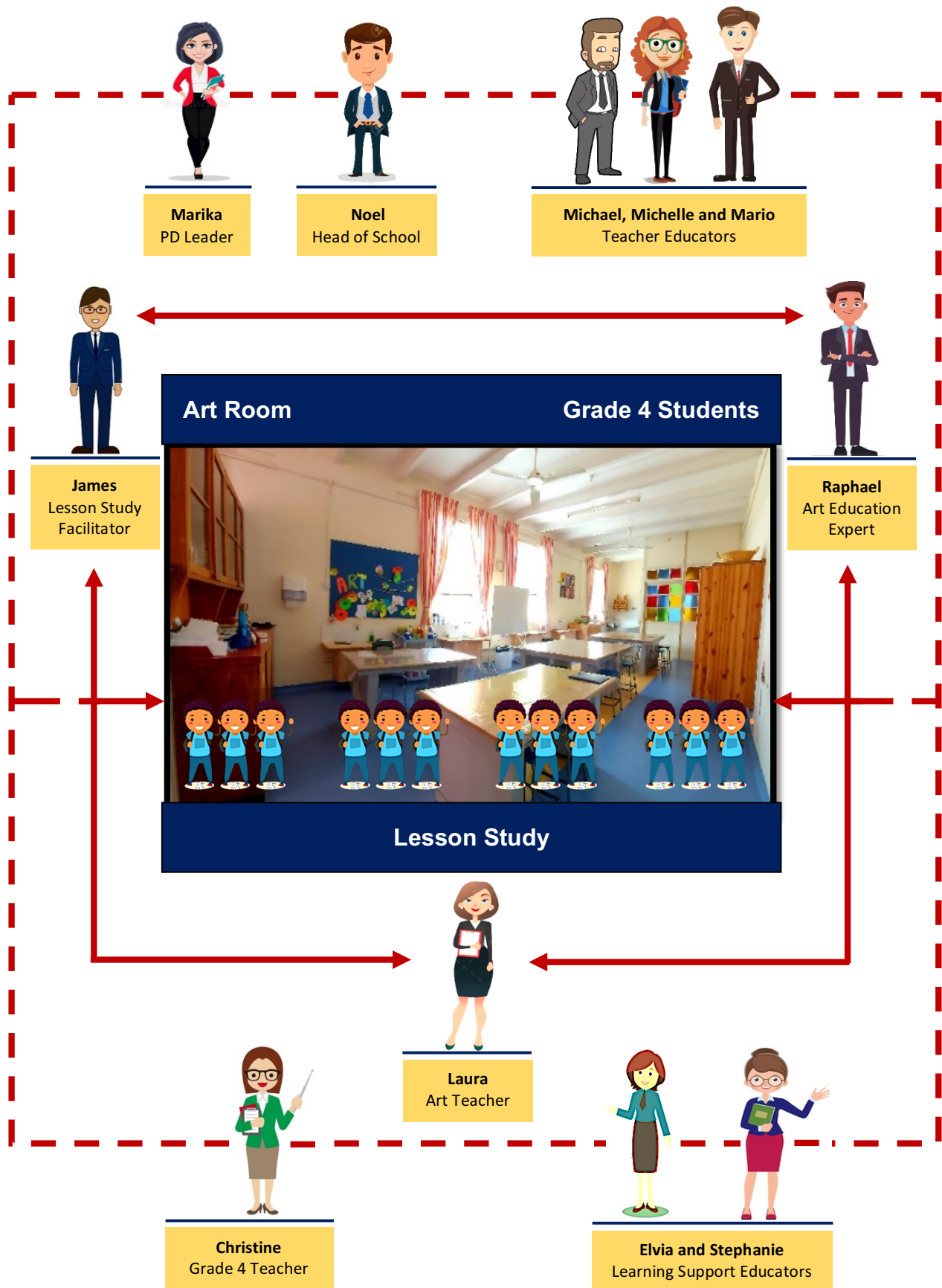
<b>Marika</b>	Professional Development Leader
---------------	---------------------------------

James and Laura also invited members from the Faculty of Education (University of Malta). Raphael was involved at the planning stage while other members then joined him for the lesson observations and the post-lesson discussions.



**Faculty of Education  
University of Malta**

<b>James</b>	Lesson study facilitator
<b>Raphael</b>	Art education expert
<b>Michael</b>	Teacher educator
<b>Michelle</b>	Teacher educator
<b>Mario</b>	Teacher educator



## Key stages in our lesson study process

In applying the lesson study cycle, we went through a number of key stages that were necessary for undertaking the lesson study process. We identified seven stages as crucial for enhancing the professional learning of the teacher and, at the same time, supporting student learning.

This lesson study involved an Art teacher working with a lesson study facilitator. The teacher engaged in the lesson study process to develop her personal and professional learning while rethinking her classroom practices. The ultimate aim was to gain a better understanding of student learning during an Art lesson.

This collaboration, which lasted over a period of eight weeks, included the following stages:

### *Stage 1: Selecting what to teach and which class to teach*

This usually involves the teacher and the lesson study team to select **a challenging concept** to teach or for the students to understand. In our case, the concept was that of foreground, middle ground and background and their use in an artwork. We chose a Grade 4 class and identified the particular week within the teacher's scheme of work. We also ensured that this lesson could be done with two Grade 4 classes within the same week.

### *Stage 2: Deciding when to teach*

This involves deciding about the period during the year and the day and time for when the lesson would be scheduled to take place. We followed the **timetable** but also made sure to select a lesson following which we had time to do a post-lesson discussion with our observers (see stages 6 and 7). The lessons were scheduled to be carried out during the first week of March 2020. The first lesson trial was planned to take place on Monday and the second lesson trial on Friday. Both lesson times were from 10:55 to 12:00 with a post-lesson discussion time-slot (12:10 to 13:00) available for the teacher and observers to use.

### *Stage 3: Identifying the goals of the lesson*

Besides addressing the **academic learning goals** for students, that is, understanding specific concepts and subject matter (see stage 1), we sought to address **broad learning goals** for the development of students' cognitive abilities, habits of mind and personal qualities. Hence, the lesson focused on collaborative learning and supporting student learning through tasks and questions that stimulate student thinking, discussion, imagination, reasoning and creative design.

### *Stage 4: Engaging in the lesson design and planning phase*

Planning a lesson study differs from everyday lesson planning. This phase (Japanese teachers refer to it as the **kyozaikenkyu**, that is, the study of instructional materials) involved ongoing



discussions based on in-depth research about resources available to teach the concept. These included curricular materials, textbooks and resources available on the internet. As the teacher and lesson study facilitator considered teaching activities, they also reflected on how these would help students achieve the intended learning goals. An important aspect in this lesson study phase was to **make student thinking visible** to the teacher and, hence, the need to have a well-developed sense about how students are likely to think about and learn the concept. In a lesson study, teachers put themselves in the position of students and imagine what it would be like for students to experience the material and lesson activities.

### **Stage 5: Identifying other potential contributors**

Besides working with the lesson study facilitator, decisions about who else to involve were taken. We refer to other potential contributors as **knowledgeable others**, that is, people who are experts in their field and can contribute their expertise to challenge and extend our thinking. We involved a number of experts at two levels: (1) at lesson planning and (2) for the teaching of the lesson. At the lesson planning stage, we involved an Art Education expert from the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. His role was to provide us with feedback on the lesson content, structure and design of activities. For the teaching of the lesson we invited a number of observers that included primary education experts, professional development leaders, a member of the senior leadership team, a teacher and learning support educators.

### **Stage 6: Teaching and observing the lesson**

The teaching of the research lesson is done by **one of the teachers in the lesson study team**. The other lesson study members and guest observers attend the lesson to collect data. Instead of observing how the teacher teaches the lesson, observers focus on how students respond to the lesson activities. In our case, it was the Art teacher who taught the two lesson trials with two of her Grade 4 classes. The lesson was taught at a scheduled time (see stage 2). For the first trial, 6 observers (Head of School, a teacher, learning support educator, two lesson study facilitators and Art education expert) attended. For the second trial, there were 7 observers (Head of School, a teacher, learning support educator, two lesson study facilitators, a professional development leader and a primary education expert) present.

### **Stage 7: Doing a post-lesson discussion**

Soon after the lesson, the teacher and the observers hold a **debriefing meeting** to examine the evidence related to the learning goals and to reflect on their experience observing students. To do this, we adopted ground rules to guide our discussion. The teacher spoke first; then it was the turn of the lesson study facilitator and observers to speak. Participants first shared the positive outcomes emerging from the lesson and this was then followed by a second round of suggestions for improvement.

## Lesson study meetings

Besides the face-to-face meetings that are listed below, Laura and James kept ongoing online communications via email and Facebook Messenger.

<p><b>Meeting 1</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; James</b></p> <p>December 16, 2019</p>	<p><b>Overview of lesson study process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An overview of the lesson study process, goals and benefits for teacher and students;</li> <li>▪ A discussion of a tentative time-frame for lesson study.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 2</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; class teacher</b></p> <p>December 17, 2019</p>	<p><b>Involving the class teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A presentation of a lesson study to the class teacher;</li> <li>▪ An explanation of Laura's involvement in the lesson planning and observation phases.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 3</b></p> <p><b>James, Laura &amp; SLT</b></p> <p>January 13, 2020</p>	<p><b>Discussion with Senior Leadership Team (SLT)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A presentation of the lesson study to SLT;</li> <li>▪ An explanation of Laura's interest in lesson study;</li> <li>▪ A discussion of the SLT involvement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 4</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; James</b></p> <p>January 15, 2020</p>	<p><b>Identifying a challenging Art topic or concept to teach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An agreement of the time-frame for teaching the lesson taught;</li> <li>▪ A discussion of possible topics for lesson study;</li> <li>▪ An identification of potential knowledgeable others to invite.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 5</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; James</b></p> <p>January 28, 2020</p>	<p><b>Discussing teaching materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A discussion of curriculum materials and resources available;</li> <li>▪ A critical evaluation of resources;</li> <li>▪ A decision on how to start working on lesson plan and how to communicate developments online.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 6</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; class teacher</b></p> <p>January 31, 2020</p>	<p><b>Sharing insights with class teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A presentation of Laura's Art concept addressed in lesson study;</li> <li>▪ A discussion of students' grouping for pair work activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting 7</b></p> <p><b>Laura &amp; James</b></p> <p>February 13, 2020</p>	<p><b>Revising the lesson plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A revision of lesson plan activities;</li> <li>▪ An amendment of the PowerPoint presentation;</li> <li>▪ A proposal of new activities.</li> </ul>

<b>Meeting 8</b>	<b>Visiting the Art room</b>
Laura & James February 18, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A discussion of class arrangement based on lesson plan activities;</li> <li>▪ A revision of lesson plan details.</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting 9</b>	<b>Discussion with Art Education expert</b>
Laura, James & Raphael February 18, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A presentation of the lesson plan and lesson activities;</li> <li>▪ Reaction and recommendations by Raphael;</li> <li>▪ A proposal to use collage instead of painting.</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting 10</b>	<b>Final review of the lesson plan</b>
Laura & James February 24, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A completion of final changes to lesson plan;</li> <li>▪ A review of the set of resources to be used;</li> <li>▪ A discussion of the lesson observation sheet.</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting 11</b>	<b>Going over lesson plan ahead of Trial 1</b>
Laura & James February 29, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A revision of the lesson plan and all finalised resources;</li> <li>▪ A clarification of the details related to the different lesson phases.</li> </ul>
March 2, 2020	<b>Lesson study (Trial 1)</b> <b>Post-lesson discussion</b>
<b>Meeting 12</b>	<b>Discussing post-lesson feedback of Trial 1</b>
Laura & James March 3, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A discussion of all the feedback shared during the debriefing session;</li> <li>▪ An agreement on a list of changes to make to the lesson;</li> <li>▪ An amendment to some of the resources.</li> </ul>
March 6, 2020	<b>Lesson study (Trial 2)</b> <b>Post-lesson discussion</b>
<b>Meeting 13</b>	<b>Discussing post-lesson feedback of Trial 2</b>
Laura & James March 10, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A discussion of all the feedback shared during the debriefing session;</li> <li>▪ An identification of the insights gained from this lesson study;</li> <li>▪ A suggestion of possibilities for future lessons involving this art concept.</li> </ul>

# LESSON PLAN

## Lesson overview

The aim of a lesson study is to identify a concept (in our case an Art concept since it is a lesson study focusing on an Art lesson) in which students tend to struggle or find it hard to grasp/understand effectively.

The teacher decided that the lesson focuses on supporting students to understand the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background and helping them appreciate how these are portrayed in an image. The lesson involved active learning pedagogies, mainly through discussion, creative thinking, pair work, creating an artwork (collage) and justifying choices in creating the collage.

The lesson is divided into five main activities:

### **Activity 1: Whole-class discussion**

Students are provided with different images and are asked to comment about them.

### **Activity 2: Consolidation exercise**

Working in pairs, students label the 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background' of an image using three flashcards provided.

### **Activity 3: Task introduction**

Teacher introduces the pairwork task involving a collage design. She also explains the resources and how students are expected to work in pairs.

### **Activity 4: Pair work**

Students work together to design their collage based on a particular theme. They are given a number of resources including: printed images, cardboard, glue, scissors and colours.

### **Activity 5: Lesson closure**

Teacher asks pairs of students to present their collage and explain their choice of images included in their collage. Other students are encouraged to comment about what they like about the design of the collage.



## Lesson title

Using foreground, middle ground and background in an artwork

## Class

A group of 12 boys who are 8 years old (Grade 4) in a mixed-ability classroom

## Lesson dates

<b>Lesson Trial 1:</b>	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2020	Grade 4 Miguel
<b>Lesson Trial 2:</b>	Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2020	Grade 4 Benjamin

## Lesson time and duration

10:55 – 12:00 (65 minutes)

**Post-lesson discussion:** 12:10 – 13:00

## Lesson focus





- Understanding the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background and how these are portrayed in images;
- Learning how to make use of and put these concepts in an artwork.

## Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes support the National Curriculum Framework and include the embedding of a number of cross curricular themes. In our case, we embed ***cognitive and creative learning***, ***literacy*** and ***education for diversity***.

By the end of the lesson, the children:

- will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the developments in their work as they acquire skills and use a range of media (crayons, pencil colours, glue, scissors, images)

-  CREATIVE LEARNING: can visually respond to visual elements found in nature, man-made objects and the built environment, in 2-Dimensional and 3-Dimensional work.
-  COGNITIVE LEARNING: can identify a landscape with **foreground, middle ground** and **background**; can do a landscape with **foreground, middle ground** and **background**
-  COMMUNICATING DIVERSITY: can feel motivated to assist their peers during group activities.
-  LISTENING AND SPEAKING: are aware of the relationship between evaluating their own work and evaluating works of art and artefacts that they are shown.

## Resources

- A handout with the grouping of the students' names in pairs
- PowerPoint presentation
- A4 printed and laminated photos (3 copies of the 3 photos taken from the PowerPoint)
- Flashcards: 'foreground', 'middle ground', 'background' (6 sets)
- Blue tack
- 6 packs with printed images in each
- 6 A3 size light blue cardboard
- A5 sheets of white paper
- 12 glue sticks
- 12 pairs of scissors
- Pencils, rubbers, crayons, and pencil colours

## Welcome

### Time

5 minutes (10.55 – 11.00)

1. When the boys enter the Art room, they sit down in pairs **in the discussion room** (boys will be informed beforehand who their partner will be). Then they are greeted:
2. **Good morning and welcome! Today I have a lesson that I prepared together with some of the visitors who are with us today. They are here to see us work and learn with us. I**

would like you to feel relaxed and be yourself. During this lesson, we will learn how artists plan to make use of space on their paper before they draw or paint something. We are going to see how they do it and what we can learn from them. I need your ideas, so it is important for you to think about the questions I will be asking and to participate. At some point, you will be working and discussing in pairs and you will also be doing an artwork later on, so it is important for you to give your full attention.

## Activity 1

### Discussing images; introducing 'foreground', 'middle ground' & 'background'

Time

15 minutes (11.00 – 11.15)

#### Resources

- PowerPoint presentation
- Laptop and projector

#### Activity

The goal for the first part of the PowerPoint presentation is to set the boys thinking on what they can see and interpret from the images presented to them. Keep questions open-ended as much as possible – let them come up with the main points for discussion. At this point do not introduce the terms F/M/B. The teacher will allow and support students to think about concepts such as size (e.g. dog's, poppies', trees', mountains' size), distance (e.g. trees, building, mountains placed at the back of the images), colour (e.g. from bright to fading with distance), photographer's position (can all objects be seen in their full proportion in each image?). These images will serve to invite the boys to think critically and learn how to analyse and discuss images they are presented with. Guidance and prompts will be given by the teacher on the spot according to the needs that may arise.

- Start the PowerPoint.

#### Slide 1

Say: I would like you to look closely at the following image I am going to show you.

#### Slide 2: Dogs' image

Last Summer I visited my friend Liza in England. She has two very cute dogs named Sally and Snowflake. Here is a photo of the dogs.



Questions to consider asking:

- Do you like this image I took of the dogs? Why do you/don't you like it?
- What can you see in this image?
- What does the image tell us about the dogs?
- Do you think these are big or small dogs? How do you know?
- What else can you see?
- What do you think could be between the dogs and the trees?
- Where do you think the photographer is?

### Slide 3: Poppies & building image

I love travelling and I love taking photos. In fact, I like to make an album for every holiday I go to! This is a photo I had taken when I was on holiday few years ago.



Questions to consider asking:

- What do you like about this photo? Why?
- What can you see in this photo?
- What about the colours in this photo? (*very bright & rich in colour*)
- Why do they look like this? (*they are very close to us so we can see them really well*)
- Can you mention something that is far away from the photographer? How do you know it is far away? (*the building looks lighter in colour, not so bright like the poppies, the poppies are looking large when compared to the building*)
- What do you think could be between the poppies and the building?

#### Slide 4: Mont Sainte Victoire by Paul Cezanne – painting

Here is one of my favourite paintings done by one of my favourite artists called Paul Cezanne.



Questions to consider asking:

- What do you like about this painting? Why?
- What can you see in this painting?
- What can you tell me about the trees in front?
- Can you mention something that is far away from the artist? How do you know it is far away?

#### Slide 5

Ask a boy to read:

In art, artists use what we call **foreground, middle ground and background**.



- **Is there a word which you are familiar with?** Allow a couple of minutes for some possible responses from the boys. Process such responses. If while they are explaining they refer to any one of the photos we discussed earlier, go back to that slide.
- **If, for example, this is the artist's paper, (point to the image on the right) the artist may place objects in the foreground (in front), in the middle ground (in the middle ground) and in the background (at the back).**

### Slide 6

Ask a boy to read:

The **Background** shows things at the back of an image. Objects in the background usually look **small and light in colour**.

- Ask

**So, what is in the background in this image?**

Boys reply "the hills". Click so that the arrow comes up.

### Slide 7

Ask a boy to read:

What is the foreground? The **foreground** shows things in front in an image. Objects in the foreground usually look **big**.

- Ask

**So, what is in the foreground in this image?**

Boys reply "the rocks". Click so that the arrow comes up.

### Slide 8

Ask a boy to read:

The **Middle ground** shows things in the middle of the image. Objects in the middle ground usually **look smaller** than those placed in the foreground.

- Ask

**So, what is in the middle ground in this image?** Boys reply "the sea".

Click so that the arrow comes up.

- **What can you tell me about the rocks in the foreground to the sea in the middle ground? (they are covering part of the sea so we cannot see all the sea – we call this overlapping). This is what happened to the dog that covered the grass and we couldn't see what could be in the middle of that image.**

## Activity 2

### Consolidation task on 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background'

Time

5 minutes (still in the discussion room) – (11.15 – 11.20)

#### Resources

- A4 printed and laminated image (1 image per pair)
- Flashcards: 'foreground', 'middle ground', 'background' (6 sets)
- Blue tack

#### Activity

##### Slide 9: Pair work

- Say  
**You are now going to work in pairs (same pairs as instructed in the beginning of the lesson). I am going to give each pair an image and the flashcards 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background'. Discuss and work in pairs to label the 'foreground', 'the middle ground' and the 'background' of this image. You have 2 minutes for this activity. I need you to focus on the words, discuss and reach an agreement before you decide to label them.**
- Allow around 1 minute. Then ask each pair to stick their images with blue tack at the top. Attach the images to the wooden board in the discussion room. Stick the other images underneath.
- Have a look at how they labelled their images and discuss any difficulties they had.

## Activity 3

### Introducing the task (at the teacher's desk)

Time

10 minutes (11.20 - 11.30)

#### Resources

A sample on teacher's desk to help in explaining the task:

- A pack with printed images
- A3 size light blue cardboard
- Some A5 white paper

## Activity

- As soon as the boys come out from the discussion room, the boys gather around the teacher's desk for an explanation of the task.
- *During this explanation, keep a pack next to you as an example.*

**For the following activity, you are going to work in pairs, together with the same boy you worked with before. You are going to make a collage. (Ask the boys if they remember what collage means: *A collage is made by sticking different materials such as cardboard pieces or coloured paper or images on another large paper or cardboard.*)**

**Each pair will be getting a pack filled with images that show a theme – either 'In the park' or 'At the beach'. I am also going to give you a large piece of light blue cardboard, glue and scissors. You are going to make one collage between you (in pairs). First you are going to take out and have a look at the images you have in the pack. Then, discuss together which images you like and which ones you would like to include in your collage. You do not have to use all of them and you may choose to add other things by drawing them on the extra papers I am giving you. Feel free to cut the images the way you would like them to look on your collage. When you are happy with the chosen images, spread them out on the large cardboard and see how it is best to place them to bring out the Background, the Middle ground and the Foreground of your collage. Hint: Take note of the size of the images! That will help you decide whether to put them in the F/ M or B. The last step is to stick everything down. Try to be as creative as possible. Discuss with your partner and share ideas before sticking anything. I will be coming around to listen to your discussions and see you working. You have 25 minutes to do this activity.**

- Answer and clarify any questions they may have while still at the teachers' desk.
- Give out the pack per pair. Boys take a seat at the tables in the Art room, sitting next to their partner.

## Activity 4

### Making a collage of a given theme: 'In the park' or 'At the beach'

Time

25 minutes (11.30 – 11.55)




#### Resources

- 6 packs with printed images in each
- 6 A3 size light blue cardboard
- Some A5 sheets of white paper
- 12 glue sticks
- 12 pairs of scissors
- Pencils, rubbers, crayons, pencil colours
- 'Doing your collage' guidelines card


#### Activity


- Working in pairs, boys start working on their collage, using the resources given to them and those prepared on the tables. They are also provided with a card as guidelines.
- The teacher goes around to assist the boys while they discuss, select, cut and stick the images. She may remind them that objects in the background will look smaller than those in the middle ground, and objects in the foreground will look bigger (refer to the images hanging on the board used in the pair work activity).
- Teacher may also remind students that they can modify and cut the images to their liking. They may also add drawings of other objects which they feel would make their collage look complete (using the loose papers given).

**Doing your collage**

1. Look at the pictures in the pack. 
2. Choose the pictures for your collage. You do not have to use them all.  
You may choose to add other things (draw these on the white paper). 
3. You can cut  the pictures.
4. Spread the pictures on the cardboard to create the Background, the Middle ground and the Foreground.

Hint: Take note of the size of the pictures! That will help you decide where to put them

5. Stick the pictures. 

 25 minutes

## Activity 5

### Closure of lesson

Time

5 minutes (11.55 – 12.00)

#### Resources

- Children's collages

#### Activity

- At the end of the lesson, all boys gather around the teacher's desk. With them they bring their collage.
- Briefly, tell each pair to show their artwork to the rest of the class.
- Invite another pair of boys to comment on what they like in their friends' drawing and why.

Questions to ask the boys showing their collage:

- **What did you place in the F/M/B of your collage?**
- **Why did you select those images?**
- **Which ones did you leave out and why?**

Questions to ask the boys giving comments:

- **I would like you to share with \*name of boys\* what you like about their collage and why.**

#### Homework

- Invite the boys to practise F/M/B in photography too. During the week, boys may use their own school tablet (or if they prefer to use another device of their choice, they would need to print out their photos to show them to me & their classmates) to take photos of things/objects they like in F/M and B.

# LESSON OBSERVATION SHEET

## Looking for the evidence

<b>Activity 1: Introduction – whole class discussion</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Provides ideas about the images shown</i>			
<i>Distinguishes between objects that are close and far</i>			
<i>Identifies objects in F/M/B (foreground, middle ground background) based on definition</i>			
<b>Activity 2: Consolidation task</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B in their decision to label images</i>			
<i>Identifies and labels the F/M/B of the photos</i>			
<b>Activity 3: Task presentation</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Listens to what the teacher is explaining</i>			
<i>Understands what he is expected to do on the task</i>			
<i>Understands how he needs to collaborate with his peer</i>			
<b>Activity 4: Pair work – Collage design</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B concepts in their discussions</i>			
<i>Fixes images on cardboard according to F/M/B concepts</i>			
<i>Creates new images based on F/M/B concepts</i>			
<b>Activity 5: Whole class presentation</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Explains in some detail his work on the collage</i>			
<i>Justifies his decisions based on F/M/B concepts</i>			
<i>Identifies a positive aspect related to F/M/B concepts</i>			

# LESSON IN PICTURES

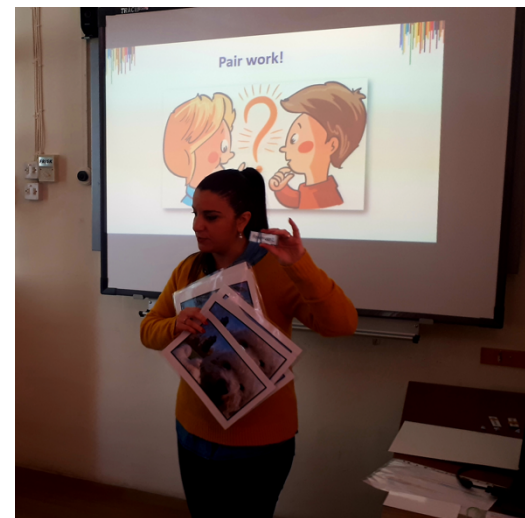


## Pictures tell a thousand stories

### Activity 1: Whole-class discussion



### Activity 2: Consolidation exercise





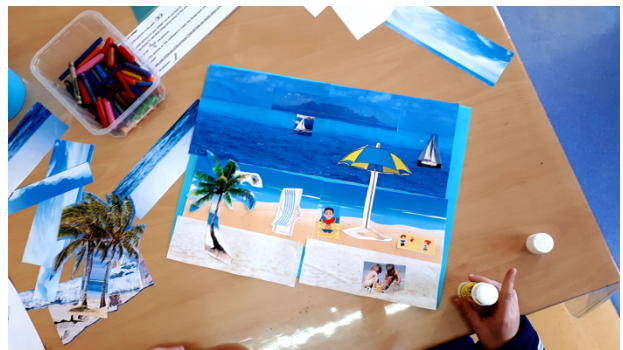


**Activity 3: Task introduction – designing a collage**





**Activity 4: Pair work on collage**





**Activity 5: Lesson plenary**



**Final products: Students' collages**







*Post-lesson discussion: Debriefing session with observers*



## DATA COLLECTED

## Samples of the evidence collected by observers

### Lesson Observation Sheet – Looking for the evidence

Activity 1: Introduction – whole class discussion			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Provides ideas about the images shown</i>	✓		<i>Quite observant. An eye for detail.</i>
<i>Distinguishes between objects that are close and far</i>	✓		<i>Yes to they also imagine such as the one about the litten. Can analyse &amp; go into detail</i>
<i>Identifies objects in F/M/B (foreground, middle ground background) based on definition</i>	✓		<i>Proffers brilliant. Again could tell diff between 3 words</i>
Activity 2: Consolidation task			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B in their decision to label images</i>	✓		<i>Consulted each other.</i>
<i>Identifies and labels the F/M/B of the photos</i>	✓		<i>Could do it</i>
Activity 3: Task presentation			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Listens to what the teacher is explaining</i>	✓		<i>Through their explanation</i>
<i>Understands what he is expected to do on the task</i>	✓		<i>Very attentive</i>
<i>Understands how he needs to collaborate with his peer</i>	✓		<i>"</i>
Activity 4: Pair work – Collage design			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B concepts in their discussions</i>	✓		<i>Heard them discussing.</i>
<i>Fixes images on cardboard according to F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>Fixed well.</i>
<i>Creates new images based on F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>Good picture creation.</i>
Activity 5: Whole class presentation			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Explains in some detail his work on the collage</i>	✓		<i>Could explain answers to the teacher we asked.</i>
<i>Justifies his decisions based on F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>He was aware of the meaning of F/M/B</i>
<i>Identifies a positive aspect related to F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>From what was put in do create the picture.</i>



## Lesson Observation Sheet – Looking for the evidence

Activity 1: Introduction – whole class discussion			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
Provides ideas about the images shown	✓		He had his hand raised + contributed
Distinguishes between objects that are close and far	✓		He showed he was following
Identifies objects in F/M/B (foreground, middle ground background) based on definition		✓	I cannot really say but it seemed like he was following.
Activity 2: Consolidation task			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
Mentions F/M/B in their decision to label images	✓		He labelled them correctly and explained his actions
Identifies and labels the F/M/B of the photos	✓		Yes, he labelled them.
Activity 3: Task presentation			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
Listens to what the teacher is explaining	✓		Listens attentively
Understands what he is expected to do on the task	✓		Shows that he knows what he has to do
Understands how he needs to collaborate with his peer	✓		He takes the lead but gives his peer space to participate
Activity 4: Pair work – Collage design			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
Mentions F/M/B concepts in their discussions	✓		He gives reasons to justify his decisions
Fixes images on cardboard according to F/M/B concepts	✓		Yes, but he hesitates sometimes and is not always sure.
Creates new images based on F/M/B concepts	✓		Yes, but always consults with his peer.
Activity 5: Whole class presentation			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
Explains in some detail his work on the collage	✓		He hesitated because of different ideas + participation in pair work
Justifies his decisions based on F/M/B concepts	✓		Yes, in a lot of detail
Identifies a positive aspect related to F/M/B concepts	✓		Yes, he seems to like the structure of the picture.



## Lesson Observation Sheet – Looking for the evidence

<b>Activity 1: Introduction – whole class discussion</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Provides ideas about the images shown</i>		✓	<i>Little or no interaction</i>
<i>Distinguishes between objects that are close and far</i>		✓	<i>Mixed middle &amp; background</i>
<i>Identifies objects in F/M/B (foreground, middle ground background) based on definition</i>		✓	
<b>Activity 2: Consolidation task</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B in their decision to label images</i>		✓	<i>Very quiet</i>
<i>Identifies and labels the F/M/B of the photos</i>	✓		<i>With some assistance</i>
<b>Activity 3: Task presentation</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Listens to what the teacher is explaining</i>	✓		<i>Looking at the teacher most of the time.</i>
<i>Understands what he is expected to do on the task</i>			<i>Unclear</i>
<i>Understands how he needs to collaborate with his peer</i>	✓		<i>Talks to peer</i>
<b>Activity 4: Pair work – Collage design</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Mentions F/M/B concepts in their discussions</i>		✓	<i>Tends to rely on others</i>
<i>Fixes images on cardboard according to F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>Understands that larger images need to be in front</i>
<i>Creates new images based on F/M/B concepts</i>	✓		<i>Links different image segments to each other.</i>
<b>Activity 5: Whole class presentation</b>			
Student	Yes	No	How is it evident?
<i>Explains in some detail his work on the collage</i>		✓	
<i>Justifies his decisions based on F/M/B concepts</i>		✓	
<i>Identifies a positive aspect related to F/M/B concepts</i>			

# POST-LESSON DISCUSSION FEEDBACK

## Trial 1

This post-lesson discussion was attended by the teacher (Laura), the lesson study facilitator (James), the Art Education expert (Raphael), a member of the CLeStuM team (Michael), the Head of School (Noel) and the class teacher (Christine). The following are the insights raised, based on the evidence collected during the lesson observation:

### Part 1: Possible improvements

- Teacher can introduce lesson structure and prepare students for activities;
- The concept of foreground, as presented in the slide with labels, needs to be further discussed to show that it may take up more than just the bottom of the paper;
- Change the slide with labelling of 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background';
- Since collage appears a 'new' form of producing an artwork for students, include an example of what a collage is and how it may be created;
- Students appeared more familiar with the 'Beach' rather than the 'Park' theme;
- Possibly reduce the number of images provided in the 'Park' theme;
- Having a group of three did not seem to work as well as pairs did;
- Student collaborations could be better supported; students can be provided with clear expectations about what they need to do and how they need to work together;
- Plenary part of the lesson: the teacher can start off the discussion by asking students to mention what they have put in the 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background'.

### Part 2: Changes to Trail 1 lesson plan

Laura and James agreed on a number of changes to the lesson plan.

- Introduction: mention lesson structure and activities that students would engage in;
- Task presentation: teacher also shares her expectations during pair work, namely:
  - share and discuss ideas;
  - agree before sticking images;
  - use of keywords – foreground, middle ground and background.
- Reduce images provided in the 'Park' theme to be the same number as those in the 'Beach' theme;
- Discuss further the concept of 'foreground', as presented in the slide with labels, to highlight that it may take up more than just the bottom of the paper – use the previous two images (dogs and painting) to illustrate this;
- In the plenary, the teacher will start off the discussion by asking students to specifically mention what they have put in the 'foreground', 'middle ground' and 'background'.

## Trial 2

For the post-lesson discussion, the following people were present: the Art teacher (Laura), the lesson study facilitator (James), teacher educators (Marika and Mario), the Head of School (Noel) and the class teacher (Christine). Michelle, a member of the CLeStuM team and teacher educator who observed the lesson, provided us her feedback via email.

The following are the salient points based on evidence collected during the lesson observation.

### Part 1: Positive aspects and improvements on Trial 1

- Setting a calm atmosphere, where students could share ideas freely, safely and confidently, was crucial to their grasping of the F/M/B concepts;
- The learning intention was clear enough, the structure of the lesson and phases were well linked and supported student learning of the F/M/B concepts;
- The tasks used offered accessible entry points for all students and opportunities to excel in their abilities;
- Discussion in pairs was more focused on F/M/B with students showing better articulation of concepts linked to their collage;
- Students understood their work and their roles during pair work;
- Students' creativity was evident;
- Students appeared proactive, attentive, engaged and motivated;
- Students were able to gain deep insights using words such as 'background' and 'overlap' to explain their work on the collage;
- Lesson time was very well managed and activities were properly set;
- The teacher's use of questions facilitated thinking and decision-making;
- The teacher included every student in the whole-class discussions and accepted multiple interpretations offered by students;
- Such a lesson could serve as a model for teachers' language teaching in introducing vocabulary.






### Part 2: Possible further improvements

- Use teacher cards with important details that teacher needs to provide to students;
- Put more emphasis on how students need to work in pairs and take decisions;
- Avoid pairs sitting next to each other having the same collage theme;
- The pairing of students needs to be reviewed and studied further;
- Perhaps reversing the structure of the lesson, starting with the collage, could be another way of doing this lesson study to research how students learn.

# STUDENT FEEDBACK

## Student feedback sheet

Shade the face for each statement below.

<p>I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.</p>	
<p>During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.</p>	
<p>During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.</p>	
<p>I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an Artwork.</p>	
<p>I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.</p>	

From 1 to 10 what score would you give this lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

Add any other comments

---



---

Thank you

## Samples of feedback collected from students

Shade the smiley face for the questions below:

I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.	
During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.	
During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.	
I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an art work.	
I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.	

From 1 to 10 what score would you give this lesson? 10

Add any other comments

I liked this lesson so much that I wish for more lessons of art.

Thank you

Shade the smiley face for the questions below:

I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.	
During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.	
During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.	
I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an art work.	
I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.	

From 1 to 10 what score would you give this lesson? 10

Add any other comments

Thanks ms Lwa for the nice lesson you did for us. I appreciate.

Thank you

Shade the smiley face for the questions below:

I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.	
During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.	
During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.	
I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an art work.	
I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.	

From 1 to 10 what score would you give this lesson? 10

Add any other comments

This was a creative, lovely and fun activity I would love more of these lessons.

Thank you

Shade the smiley face for the questions below:

I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.	
During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.	
During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.	
I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an art work.	
I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.	

From 1 to 10 what score would you give this lesson? 9

Add any other comments

---



---

Thank you

## Analysis of students' feedback

A total of 22 feedback sheets were collected from students.

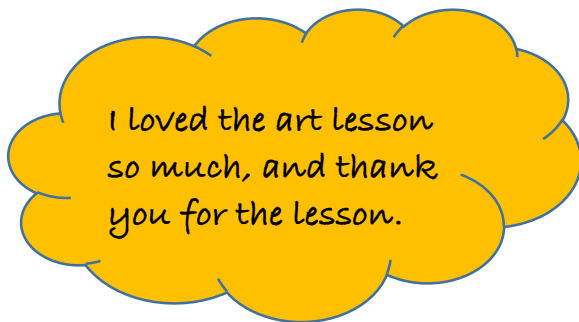
All students filled in the statements section while 15 provided comments about the lesson.

Statement	😊	😐	😞
I shared my ideas about what I liked in the photos taken by Ms. Laura.	19	3	0
During the flashcards activity, I worked well with my partner.	19	3	0
During the collage activity, I could share my opinions and ideas with my partner.	18	4	0
I know how to use foreground, middle ground and background in an Artwork.	20	2	0
I would like to have more lessons where observers come to see us learn.	21	1	0

### Lesson score:

Out of the 22 students, 20 gave a score of 10, one student a score of 9 and another a score of 8. The total score was of **217** out of **220**.

## Students' comments





I like your lessons and doing more creativity and drawing wonderful stuff.

I liked the lesson because I liked working in pairs and it was great fun.

I liked this lesson. I wish we had more like this lesson.

I love that we make lots and lots of crafts. I have lots of fun with you.

This was a creative, lovely and fun activity. I would love more of these lessons.

I liked this lesson so much that I wish for more lessons of art.

Thanks for the nice lesson you did for us, I appreciate.

I loved the lesson. Thank you!

I love art!!!

# REFLECTIONS

## Reflections of observers

*I base my feedback on the professional learning that I experienced during the first trial of the research lesson conducted by Laura. Firstly, it was a great personal learning experience. Although I have taught at primary level, I had never before observed a 'proper' Art lesson. I've learned so much about Art and Art teaching, but also (and possibly more important from my perspective) I've come to realise that there is so much in common about the teaching of Art and Mathematics, which is my area of expertise. Secondly, I noted how the post-lesson feedback session served to foreground and value different professional perspectives. The ensuing discussion, which was grounded in evidence and professional collaboration, aimed to support the teacher, to recognise good practice, and to offer suggestions toward improved practice. As such, learning was taking place on multiple levels, leaving us all wanting to engage further into the practice of lesson study.*

**Dr Michael Buhagiar**

**CLeStuM team member & Mathematics teacher educator**

**Faculty of Education, University of Malta**

I feel it is always a privilege to be invited in someone's class to observe. A community of learners receives you, and you are made privy to what goes on in that community, not just in the specific lesson / s you observe but also in these learners' lives and experiences within that community. As part of this lesson study for Art, I was particularly intrigued at how the learners, and the educators, went about with their work without really minding that they were being observed - this kind of culture is not so common in Maltese classrooms. Thanks to this 'business as usual' attitude I could walk around and observe children's work more closely and also listen to their mini conversations. This helped me get a better perspective of what is happening, albeit I was an outsider to the class. While I was observing I was switching between the role of the teacher, and that of a student, because this kind of 'physical mobility' gave me the opportunity to relate to both. I was thus able to understand why the teacher was taking certain steps and at the same time put myself in the shoes of a 8-year old and become familiar to the way he would reason or perceive art concepts. I could also note that although I was a guest in that classroom, what I observed was important to this community of learners. Yet, it was not more important than the learning process itself, which took priority. The lesson developed in a particular way because those who planned it believed it could lead to effective outcomes, and although as an observer I could suggest other ideas, I was fully aware that my ideas, at that point in time, could wait. This gave me the chance to enjoy the lesson and appreciate what was happening.

**Dr Michelle Attard Tonna**

**CLeStuM team member and Deputy Dean**

**Faculty of Education, University of Malta**

*Observing a lesson study was an enriching experience to myself as an educator as well as to the students and all those present. It was immediately evident that the lesson was planned well and focused on engaging the students through proper teaching strategies based on good questioning techniques, fun resources, educational activities and healthy discussions which ensured the participation of every student while tapping each individual's potential.*

*I am sure that no student was left out as each one was given the opportunity to actively participate at his own level. The students were really motivated as they did not only answer the questions directed at them but elaborated on them showing that they were being very attentive and involved in the lesson. It was also interesting to note the different roles students took according to character and expertise while working in pairs.*

*Although this was basically an art lesson, the students were exposed to the art of photography as well as to the proper use of language which helps interpret images and what they represent. The students' creativity and imagination was manifested in more than one way which showed that when lessons are planned well, the students do not feel any barriers to teaching and learning. The discussion among the professionals that ensued after the lesson study proved that sharing of resources, planning together and being open to one another's ideas results in good planning and inculcates a love to learn and improve.*

**Mr Mario Testa**

**Teacher educator**

**Faculty of Education, University of Malta**

*The Art Lesson Study has been a very enriching experience. It has helped me, as an observer, to identify a number of good practices during a lesson that help students understand better the concept being presented to them. One such good practice was the use of questioning techniques. I observed how this practice should not only be used to get answers from students but also as a means to induce critical thinking. This was evident throughout the lesson, and helped to stimulate student thinking and to keep on asking questions related to the discussion.*

*One other aspect observed during the entire process of the lesson study was how collaboration between teachers and other professionals within the educational sector could be done. Working together enhances opportunities of seeking new methods or of even improving already existing ones, aimed towards making learning objectives more attainable for students.*

*I recommend that other teachers take part in a lesson study in order to serve as an effective means of professional development, especially nowadays where the educational sector is constantly changing and employing new ways of teaching.*

**Ms Christine Deguara**

**Grade 4 teacher**

**Stella Maris College Junior School**

*I liked the fact that the lesson included both a theoretical part, as well as a creative, hands on aspect. Everything was well-timed and Laura's time-management was impeccable. The lesson was not rushed and the students had time to finish all the activities planned, including enough time for discussing the creative process. I am not sure whether the teacher-directed presentation at the beginning was actually necessary for this particular lesson. It might have been possible to elicit the main objective from the students' own work. But this is just a personal opinion.*

*However, I appreciated the fact that as part of the desired learning outcomes, the teacher emphasised the importance of soft skills which are necessary for a holistic education and for the modern workforce. During the paired work, I could observe elements of creative thinking in the collage exercise, excellent time management especially when students planned their own work and finished on time without excessive teacher prompting. I liked teamwork where students had to divide work and help each other and even engage in conflict resolution in order to compromise and come to an agreement about the collage.*

*All in all, I think it was an enjoyable lesson, both from the point of view of the observer as well as for the students.*

**Ms Marika Abela**  
**Professional development leader**  
**Secretariat for Catholic Education, Malta**

*The lesson observation I did in the first lesson trial was preceded by a meeting at the University of Malta, during which we discussed the lesson plan. The lesson focused on depth in images, summarised for simplicity's sake in three terms: foreground, middle ground and background. We made a few changes to the lesson plan related to the choice of images and the main practical task to be carried out during the lesson with the students.*

*The lesson itself went very well and was divided into three parts: an introductory session using a PowerPoint presentation, the main activity with hands-on work in small groups and a final class discussion about the merits of all the collage works produced by the class. The use of small groups was particularly effective because the pupils could negotiate meanings and take collective decisions. When the lesson came to an end, the class teacher, observers and Head of School discussed the lesson. This was a very important stage, during which alternative modes of delivery and views about the pupils' creative output were suggested.*

**Prof Raphael Vella**  
**Art teacher educator**  
**Faculty of Education, University of Malta**

It was a luxury for the teacher to have a group of professionals engaging in a lesson study. This lesson study was an opportunity for all involved to learn and improve their knowledge about teaching. Different ideas and points of view, strengths and weaknesses were identified, shared and discussed through the lesson study ongoing process. Getting feedback was, indeed, an opportunity that every educator ought to have in order to improve.

I personally believe that educators should have mentors, especially during their initial years in their career. True professionals should be humble enough to be observed in the way they prepare and deliver lessons. Everyone involved in the lesson study process had the opportunity to learn from each other. Whether experienced or not, there is always room for improvement. Different personalities, experiences and ideas will help mould an ideal educator. However, there needs to be a commitment from either side. Taking into account today's reality, one needs to take advantage of such initiatives and to voluntarily ask to participate in a collaborative learning experience. Ideally, such learning experiences are available to as many educators as possible.

**Mr Noel Abela**  
*Head of School*

*Stella Maris College Junior School*

## The teacher's reflection

*There is robust research evidence that advocates the importance of having teacher educators and teachers working together within professional learning communities to bring about change and improvement in teaching and learning (Stoll et al., 2006; Dal & Finnigan, 2012; Vescio et al., 2008; Brown & Zhang, 2017). I have always been interested in reading and researching about these benefits and advantages of engaging in and being part of a professional learning community, yet I have always felt I lacked the opportunity of actually being part of one. When James invited me to take part in a Lesson Study, I thought this would be a great opportunity to be part of a learning network which would give me the possibility of working collaboratively with others. I was unsure how this initiative could actually work in my case, given that I am the only Art teacher within our Junior school and with a very tight timetable. On the other hand, I was aware that the Lesson Study would entail work to be done along a period of time; a process which I was willing to embark on and to learn along the way; a commitment which I was eagerly looking forward to take on.*

*During the early stages of the Lesson Study process, together with James acting as a facilitator, we identified an area which students at primary level generally struggle with when doing an artistic piece. Several meetings were held between us to discuss the best ways and means to develop a comprehensive lesson which would address the identified concepts of foreground, middle ground and background and their use in an artwork. This early period required in-depth reflections which challenged my teaching approaches, lesson-planning style, thinking habits,*

*classroom practices and strategies. Following the ongoing thought-provoking conversations with James, I found myself engaging in continuous, deep reflections looking critically on my role in the classroom, about the teacher I see myself, the lessons I plan and develop, and the reasons for adopting certain classroom practices. As a result, bringing together a lesson plan, which was eventually used for the lesson study trials, involved a process of reconsidering ideas and making modifications. This process brought about frustrations as not every change was easy to accept. Yet, I was willing to challenge myself and to take a leap forward and move away from what I considered as my comfort zone. I was indeed excited to learn that another knowledgeable other, this time within the field of Art Education, was willing to be part of this exciting initiative we had embarked on. Meeting Raphael and receiving his professional feedback and his insights was indeed another stepping stone towards creating a more robust lesson plan. Further changes and amendments were made to the lesson plan and to the resources we had planned, changes which I believe were necessary. The comments received during the debriefing sessions after each lesson trial were very positive. I was pleased with the enacted lesson and also the outcome of the collages that students created. This was the result of the very well-structured lesson plan we had developed, which has helped my students to grasp the concepts which were being explored and discussed during the lesson.*

*When I look back at the process we have been through, I see myself as transformed. I have grown to accept that I am a learner myself (and will always be); that my existing practices are not static; they need to be challenged. Through this lesson study I experienced the notion of learning and working collaboratively within a team of professionals who were willing to share their valuable insights and feedback with the aim of offering continuous support. In my case, this has led to professional improvement and growth. This learning experience was possible as it was built around trust and mutual respect. Every little effort counted and every little struggle was taken up as a learning opportunity. The evidence collected by observers show that the lesson goals were successfully achieved and that students learned the concepts being addressed during the lesson.*

*Now that this journey has reached an end, I intend to apply the skills I have achieved and the knowledge I have learned into my future lesson planning and resources preparations. I intend to collaborate further with other educators, with professionals within the field of Art Education and other knowledgeable others who can provide me with constructive feedback and support to improve my teaching and students' learning outcomes. I believe that teachers, who have teaching and learning at heart, should consider engaging in a Lesson Study since, as I have experienced, it is a transformative professional learning opportunity with endless benefits.*

**Ms Laura Formosa**

**Art teacher**

**Stella Maris College Junior School**

## The lesson study facilitator's reflection

*A lesson study process depends, to a certain degree, on the individuals forming the lesson study group. This was my first experience working closely with a single teacher – I usually work with small groups (3 to 6 teachers). Additionally, I did not know Laura and I soon realised that the context (primary education) and the content (Art) were two other key challenges for me. My idea was to engage Laura and facilitate her immersion in the lesson study process. Fortunately, I was working with a teacher who was receptive and, at the same time, willing to adopt a critical approach towards the ideas presented. Our ongoing communication, which amassed over 20 hours of one-to-one face-to-face meetings held after school hours and many more hours of daily online communications (via email and Facebook Messenger), enriched the learning process of enacting this lesson study.*

*Over the eight-week period of our ongoing collaborative work, I realised that lesson study has many facets and can serve as a powerful professional learning experience even when carried out with a single teacher. Besides working with a teacher educator, Laura had the opportunity to discuss the lesson plan and gather insights from an Art education expert, to open her classroom door to professionals so that they could observe and discuss the lesson, and to use the constructive feedback to improve her lesson. This model of professional learning is quite rare for Maltese teachers, especially those who are the only subject teachers at their school.*

*Along the process, I realised Laura's dilemmas about teaching, her tensions and frustrations. This process challenged her existing beliefs and practices. Indeed, for some aspects of her teaching, it necessitated a reconsideration of her ideas. This prompted her to delve deeper into her thinking about the kind of teacher she was, where and what she wanted to become. Lesson study was a transformative process that helped her to take up an 'expert' position because her choices were informed by her research and by the ongoing negotiations with knowledgeable others.*

*As a lesson study facilitator, this experience improved my knowledge about the power of engaging teachers in lesson study as an action research process involving them in research, planning, implementing and evaluating their practice. Also important is the aspect of providing teachers with collaborative experiences of engaging in discussions about teaching with other professionals. Teachers need critical friends to support them and facilitate their professional learning process. This experience shows that lesson study offers a meaningful learning opportunity for teachers, particularly when enacted within a safe and supportive learning environment.*

**Dr James Calleja**

**CLeStuM leader and lesson study facilitator**

**Faculty of Education, University of Malta**



# LESSON STUDY INSIGHTS

## The main insights

### Insights 1: For students

- Pair work, giving the students the possibility to become independent learners and engage in meaningful discussions with their peers, appeared to work well;
- Students demonstrated an ability to take on and share roles and responsibilities;
- Students exhibited enhanced critical thinking and decision making, justifying their choices for their Artwork;
- The active learning approaches integrated in the lessons, enabled students to take leading roles while pooling in thoughts and ideas.

### Insights 2: For the teacher

- Lesson study offered the possibility to reflect upon and challenge teaching approaches, lesson-planning style, classroom practices and other pedagogical approaches;
- Through the lesson study process, possibilities to engage in ongoing self-reflections to challenge deep-rooted thinking habits emerged;
- Tensions and dissatisfactions emanated from the suggestions offered by the lesson study facilitator and knowledgeable others;
- Tensions and frustrations served as stepping stones to reconsider practices that may eventually result in opportunities for professional growth;
- Lesson study presented an intensive, ongoing rigorous process that necessitated considerable preparation time, dedication and commitment.

### Insights 3: About the Lesson

- Lesson activities addressed students' diverse needs, offering them multiple entry points to engage with, contribute and develop their creativity;
- Acknowledging students' prior knowledge on the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background offered powerful entry points;
- Using a structured plan led to a smooth flow of interconnected activities;
- The use of collage as an artwork offered all students possibilities to demonstrate learning.

## Suggestions for the future

An aspect emerging from this lesson study is the importance of providing a **personalised professional learning opportunity** for teachers. Personalised learning includes opportunities that teachers themselves select based on their **interests and professional needs**. Lesson study is one professional development model that offers this possibility, particularly for small groups or individual teachers.

Besides traditional professional development sessions and workshops that address whole-school issues, schools may explore ongoing collaborative models that offer **a more personalised experience for teachers**. These models usually involve **creating communities** that seek to identify a challenge, within their practice, and then work together in an attempt to address it. There are different ways in which this can be done. For example, teachers within professional learning groups can work on (1) **video analysis** of a lesson or part of a lesson to discuss student learning; (2) **lesson observation** as a means to observe and discuss practices with colleagues; and (3) **co-teaching** during which two or more educators engage in a co-learning experience to plan, teach and evaluate a lesson.

Personalised professional learning models are usually founded upon four learning principles.

- **Community building** – through sharing and negotiation of knowledge teachers learn with and from those making up the community;
- **Critical friendships** – teachers require knowledgeable others who establish co-learning experiences with them while acting as their critical friends;
- **Safe environment** – creating a non-threatening space is essential to enable teachers to share their knowledge, success stories, challenges and dilemmas;
- **Time** – teachers need time to work at their own pace, if they are to develop new ways of thinking and acting.

Schools can create **lesson study communities** where teachers teaching the same Grade level can meet, discuss and plan lessons focusing on, for example, the teaching of a particular subject content, using student-centred teaching approaches or integrating more formative assessment practices. When doing a lesson study, teachers may invite others (those teaching different Grade levels) to observe the lesson and provide feedback. Our experience tells us that the presence of a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) is also particularly essential. In particular, the SLT is likely to enhance the ongoing and timely support received by lesson study groups vis-à-vis the provision of resources (including time for professional learning), but also to sustain and scale up lesson study initiatives.

## Dissemination

The teacher and the lesson study facilitator plan to disseminate the work and findings of this lesson study process in four ways.

### Online: Social media platforms

- **Facebook and Twitter:** posts on the CLeStuM and Faculty of Education pages;
- **Newspoint:** short article published on the University of Malta online portal ([www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/news/2020/03/clestum-learning-study](http://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/news/2020/03/clestum-learning-study));
- **Website:** article published on the World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS) ([www.walsnet.org/blog/2020/03/13/teacher-professional-learning-through-lesson-study](http://www.walsnet.org/blog/2020/03/13/teacher-professional-learning-through-lesson-study)).
- **Paper:** Practice insight working paper published in CollectivED March 2020 Issue 10 ([www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/working-paper-series/collectived](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/working-paper-series/collectived)) entitled “*A transformative professional learning journey through lesson study*”.

### Publication: Lesson Study report

- This report will be published and distributed to primary schools in Malta.

### Meetings: Lesson Study report presentation

Copies of this report will be presented to:

- the Director of Curriculum and Standards (Secretariat for Catholic Education);
- the Service Manager Training and Mentoring (Secretariat for Catholic Education);
- the Dean of the Faculty of Education (University of Malta).

### Events: Oral presentations

- Presenting an abstract for presentation to **The Future of Education Conference 2020** that will be held in Florence between 18-19 June. Our abstract, accepted for presentation on 09/03/2020 is entitled “*Teacher learning within the process of Lesson Study*” (see <https://conference.pixel-online.net/FOE/acceptedabstracts.php>);
- Preparing a 45-minute workshop for the summer 2020 event organised by the Department of Leadership for Learning and Innovation at the Faculty of Education (University of Malta). This event will focus on teacher professional learning and specifically Lesson Study and mentoring.

## Final conclusions and insights gained

### Schools: Teachers and the culture of teaching

Laura was initially a bit hesitant about the idea of doing a lesson study, particularly because she is *the only Art teacher* at her school. In Malta, this situation is not uncommon as *teachers generally practise teaching on their own* (see Attard Tonna & Shanks, 2017) experiencing a ‘lone-fighter’ culture (see Krainer, 2001). In other words, teachers rarely draw on their colleagues for support and resources, and the classroom is a private place. This is likely to be the daily experience of Maltese teachers, but particularly teachers who are the only ones teaching a particular grade level or subject within their school or college.

We know that *teacher professional growth may be enhanced through collaboration* – involving other teachers and other knowledgeable others (e.g.: teacher educators and professional development providers). This *lesson study provided a collaborative opportunity* that was beneficial (in terms of professional growth) not just to Laura (the Art teacher) but, as the reflections on pages 46-52 show, to all those involved.

Doing this lesson study has opened up opportunities for Laura to see possibilities for working more closely with other professionals. In particular, her classroom developed into a site where learning did not occur exclusively for students but also for the teacher. Through lesson study, the classroom transformed itself into a *community of learners*, involving not just students but also the teacher, the learning support educator, the school leader and teacher educators. We think that school communities flourish when teachers take on the challenge to *open the classroom door* and invite visitors who are willing to share, discuss and support professional learning.

### Learning about teaching: Ensuring quality

Evidence gathered and discussed by observers attending the two lesson trials indicated that this was *a high-quality lesson* involving a seamless flow of activities that engaged the students in accessible, challenging and creative tasks. This lesson is ‘*high-quality*’ because it involved a study – indeed, it is a *lesson study*. In the process, the teacher, the facilitator and knowledgeable others engaged in *a process of researching and studying teaching materials* taking on a critical outlook to explore learning opportunities for students. The *lesson study process takes time* because it involves deep thinking about what works. More specifically, it requires *an in-depth investigation about what is likely to work for the particular students in class*. It also focuses on the content and how this is enacted during the lesson and negotiated by students, but also when and how this content is presented by the teacher. A *high-quality planning process* is driven by a committed lesson study team engaged in research carried out over a period of time. In other words, *high quality teaching requires high quality planning taking place over time*.

## Acknowledgements

This lesson study would not have been possible and successful without the support of the following:

### **1. *The students***

Grade 4 boys at Stella Maris College Junior School for providing us with the opportunity to observe the lesson and gather data. We are also grateful to them for providing us with feedback regarding their learning experiences.

### **2. *The class teacher and learning support educators***

For the enthusiasm shown, their disposition to collaborate and their time to provide the Art teacher with assistance.

### **3. *The school leadership team***

In particular, the Head of School, Mr. Noel Abela, for his ongoing support, involvement and feedback during this lesson study.

### **4. *The Secretariat for Catholic Education within the Archdiocese of Malta***

Specifically, to the Director for Curriculum and Standards and the Service Manager for Training and Mentoring for accepting our invitation to be part of this initiative.

### **5. *Academic members from the Faculty of Education***

For being part of the lesson study process providing us with comments on our lesson plan, collecting data during the two lesson trials and providing us with feedback during the post-lesson discussion meetings.

## References

- Attard Tonna, M., & Shanks, R. (2017). The importance of environment for teacher professional learning in Malta and Scotland. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(1), 91-109.
- Brown, C., & Zhang, D. (2017). How can school leaders establish evidence informed schools: An analysis of the effectiveness of potential school policy levers. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 45*(3), 382-401.
- Calleja, J. (2017). *Making Mathematical Connections: Lesson study report*. Available online: [https://issuu.com/iblmaths/docs/lesson\\_study\\_report](https://issuu.com/iblmaths/docs/lesson_study_report). Faculty of Education, Malta: University of Malta.
- Daly, A. J., & Finnigan, K. S. (2012). Exploring the space between social networks, trust and urban school district leaders. *Journal of School Leadership, 22*, 493–530.
- Huang, R., Takahashi, A., & Ponte, J. P. (2019). *Theory and Practice of Lesson Study in Mathematics*. Springer International Publishing.
- Krainer, K. (2001). Teachers' growth is more than the growth of individual teachers: The case of Gisela. *Making Sense of Mathematics Teacher Education* (pp. 271-293). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7*(4), 221–258.
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 80-91.
- Fujii, T. (2016). Designing and adapting tasks in lesson planning: A critical process of lesson study. *ZDM Mathematics Education, 48*, 411-423.





## Understanding the Use of Foreground, Middle Ground and Background in an Artwork: Lesson Study Report

### *Collaborative Lesson Study Malta*

#### The publication

© CLeStuM 2020

Downloadable at: [www.clestum.eu](http://www.clestum.eu)

ISBN: 978-99957-1-719-3

#### Contact us

Email [lessonstudymalta@gmail.com](mailto:lessonstudymalta@gmail.com)

Facebook [www.facebook.com/CLeStuM](https://www.facebook.com/CLeStuM)

Twitter [twitter.com/clestum](https://twitter.com/clestum)

Telephone 2340 3627



L-Università ta' Malta  
Faculty of Education

  
Collaborative Lesson Study Malta