Lesson Study in North America

In the U.S.A. and Canada today, there is an active movement in mathematics teaching that is striving to improve teaching using the Japanese model of Lesson Study. This movement was inspired by *The Teaching Gap* (J. Stigler & J. Hiebert, 1999), an easy-to-understand compilation of the results of a comparison of junior high school mathematics lessons in Japan, Germany, and the U.S.A.. The book argues that Japanese mathematics lessons incorporate the results of educational research more than those of the other countries and are the closest to the ideal that is being sought in the field of mathematics education. It also draws attention to Japanese-style problem-solving oriented lessons. Having learned about the role that Lesson Study plays in the process of launching Japanese-style problem-solving oriented lessons, schools and school districts (boards of education) throughout the U.S.A and Canada have begun to try implementing Lesson Study practices.

According to the Columbia University Lesson Study Research Group (directed by Clea Fernandez), there are 140 Lesson Study groups active in 29 U.S.A. states, and more than 1,100 educators from 245 schools in 80 school districts are involved in Lesson Study (as of September 2003). And the movement seems to be spreading across North America, as the first public Lesson Study event was held in the Canadian capital of Ottawa in 2004.

What is most important in this stage of the process is that high-quality Lesson Study is conducted, and that many teachers are given opportunities to learn exactly what Lesson Study is. It is essential that meetings do more than discuss surface-level matters or fall back on the notion that "classroom observation alone is enough." Instead, participants have to discuss specific issues, such as where to identify the value of their teaching materials, what should be the role of the teacher, and what improvements need to be made to create better teaching plans.
References


About 80 participants who attended a public Lesson Study event held in December 2004 in the Canadian capital Ottawa had a chance to experience a research lesson and a feedback session in a temporary classroom set up in a junior high school gymnasium.
Fig. Map of Lesson Study groups in North America