

Understanding learning-exploration of the use of Lesson Study as an approach to developing learning with international Master's students

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Introduction

Historically, the pedagogic work of lecturers within universities has been characterised firstly by its subordinate position to the activity of research and secondly by a form of 'isolationist' development, often conducted alone. Shulman (2004, 140-141) states,

'We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude... I now believe that the reason teaching is not more valued in the Academy is because the way we treat teaching removes it from the community of scholars.'

Since 2011, we have been involved in the developing the use of Lesson Study with postgraduate students within a School of Education. Lesson study (LS) is a classroom-based, collaborative, research-oriented mode of teachers' professional learning and practice development originating from Japan. The basic approach to lesson study is founded on a group of teachers identifying learning challenges experienced by students which they then attempt to ameliorate by the use of collaborative planning, observation and evaluation. Whilst this is a very popular approach to understanding and improving the learning within the school sector particular in countries such as Japan, the USA, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, and more recently the UK, it has had very little use at the higher education level.

Here, we focus on the impact Lesson Study may have on the lecturers involved, leading to the main aims of our research which were to:

1. consider the degree to which the quality of lecturers learning through collaboration in lesson study groups is enhanced;
2. considered the degree to which the quality students learning opportunities in seminars developed by lecturers participating in lesson study;
3. evaluate lesson study as a vehicle for the development of lecturers' reflective practice.

Approach

Lesson study methods vary, but are based on the simple premise of collaborative planning, teaching and evaluation between teachers. Together they identify a learning challenge, plan a 'research lesson' to meet that challenge, teach and observe the lesson, and then evaluate the outcomes. Figure 1 shows a version of this approach used in this project, which began with the identification of the learning challenge (step one). Once the learning challenge had been chosen detailed planning took place, preparing a 'research seminar' in detail, with discussion as to the expected evidence for learning demonstrated by two or 3 case students (step two). Having planned the session one of the lecturers then led the seminar and the other observed 2 or 3 case students and the evidence for their learning (step three). Finally, the two lecturers have an evaluation meeting where they considered the evidence of student learning and the degree to which they felt the learning challenge had been successfully met (step five).

Figure 1 – the Lesson Study cycle

Case students observed during the research sessions were also asked if they would be willing to complete individual interviews. Students were asked to bring any notes or other artefacts from the sessions to the interviews and these were copied and were the foundation for stimulated recall questions to open reflection and discussion about the learning process they had gone through.

Data was captured in a number of different ways, with analysis based upon the basic framework for understanding the process of learning as outlined by Illeris (2007). His theory of learning identifies three complementary elements or dimensions. These are the cognitive, emotional and social. Using this theory as a basis for our data capture and analysis, Figure 2 outlines the methods used for analysing the learning of both lecturers and students.

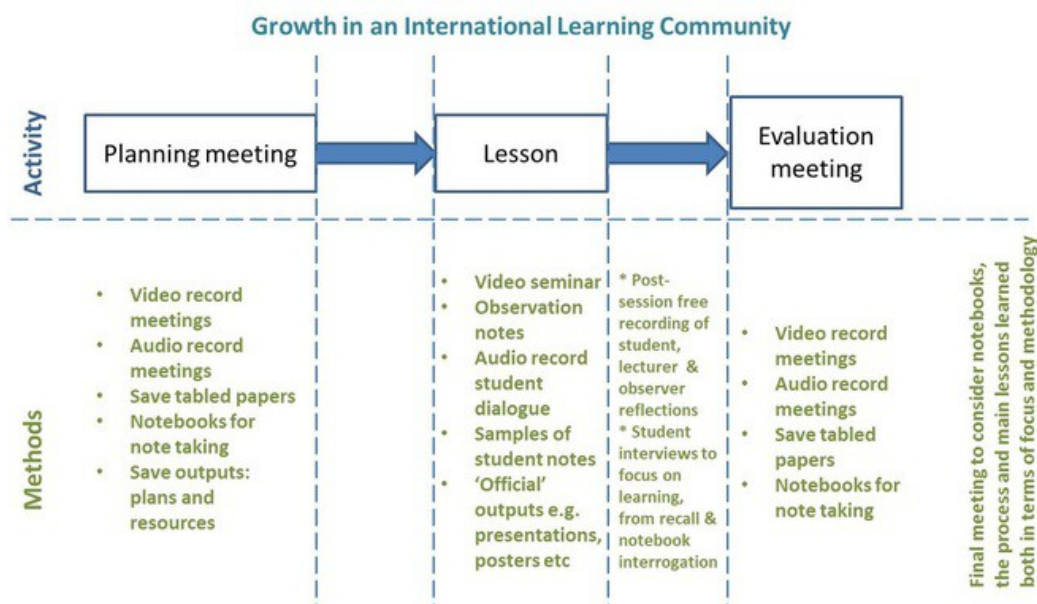


Figure 2. Sata collection system

Initial Conclusions

Our research suggests that Lesson Study offers an excellent model for lecturer reflective practice. Its collaborative and developmental nature make it ideal for encouraging groups of lecturers to work together to gain an ever deeper and more critical understanding of the pedagogic context of which they are part. In an increasingly 'performative' higher education environment open to greater levels of competition from across the globe, together with ever greater pressures to publish research, Lesson Study appears to offer a positive model of scholarship of teaching and learning which can lead to both better practice and research engagement through an enriched understanding of student learning. However, the wider Lesson Study literature, and in particular that relating to higher education, still leaves a number of unanswered questions. These include the legitimacy and use of observation as a tool for capturing and understanding the process of learning, and how other data capture tools might be used to bolster insights gained from observation. It is uncertain that we yet

have a methodological framework which can adequately capture the complexities of these processes.

Nevertheless, and excepting the unanswered questions and issues presented above, the results of our research thus far demonstrates that Lesson Study can provide a positive addition to other approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition, the results from our research have led to the development of the concept of 'pedagogic literacy' as a way of understanding the complex growth of expertise lecturers experience as they engage with pedagogic ideas and issues.

References

Illeris, K. (2007) *How we learn*. London: Routledge.

Shulman, L.S. 2004. *Teaching as Community Property: Essays on Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.