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Abstract

Purpose – This Higher Education Academy funded study explored learning challenges faced by international students early in their post-graduate courses through the use of Participatory Lesson Study (PLS). The paper aims to discuss this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – Two approaches to PLS were explored. Students were interviewed after "research lesson seminars" about their learning experiences; before two seminars, groups of students participated in planning meetings to inform preparation of seminar content and activities.

Findings – Results suggest that PLS encourages a deep consideration of pedagogy by lecturers. Observation of student learning and post-seminar interviews highlighted the complex nature of the learning that unfolds during seminars. In some cases, student explanation of learning was dissonant with observations.

Research limitations/implications – This was a small-scale project which cannot offer generalised implications for practice. However, it should act as a starting point to develop PLS on a larger scale and in other pedagogic contexts.

Practical implications – This project led to reassessment of lecturers' pedagogic assumptions and to development of new approaches. Thematic analysis of pre- and post-seminar student responses highlighted several important issues: variation in approaches to participation in seminars, variable use of technologies to support learning, importance of differentiation for learning and task-types preferred by learners.

Originality/value – Results suggest that PLS facilitates the study of learning in higher education and the development of pedagogy, informed by and responsive to the needs of international students. As such, it has the potential to support any tutors working in higher education, whilst having wider, general utility to other groups approaching the development of pedagogy through Lesson Study.

Keywords Higher education, Lesson Study, Participatory approach

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Higher education is an increasingly global sector with rising numbers of students studying in a foreign country. International students often encounter a number of learning needs and barriers in the early months of campus-based postgraduate courses, particularly in relation to academic literacy skills such as analysing research papers, reflecting on evidence and developing referencing skills. This project focuses on the use of an approach to Lesson Study which considers ways in which students can be engaged as active participants in understanding learning challenges and in creating their possible solutions. In this way, we used a participatory model of Lesson Study.

Background

The presence of international students within HE institutions within the UK has gathered pace since the 1990s due to a trend towards a global educational market based on both new technologies and shifting political contexts. Increasingly, education is seen as a commodity and HE institutions have responded by attempting to open up international markets for their courses. As Dixon (2006, p. 320) states "(universities are)

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forced into the marketplace in ways that are reshaping them in their purposes and in the knowledge they create and disseminate".

Okorocha (2010) summarises some of the main problems which international students might experience on arriving in a new learning context:

- Culture shock-the emotional response resulting from feeling a lack of understanding and confidence in an unfamiliar environment.
- Homesickness-unhappiness in an environment which is obviously unlike that of home, and which may lead to falling quality of work and a lower level of concentration in studies.
- Language difficulties-within a UK context, students may be enroling on a course where English is almost certainly their second, and possibly their third or fourth language. Language difficulties vary enormously and may include speaking as well as writing. Consequently, degree programmes become in part language courses as well as vehicles for studying the chosen academic content.
- Academic problems-some international students will have studied in teaching and learning cultures very different to those of the host country leading to a potential dissonance between experience and expectations within the new context.

It is therefore important that on courses where a high percentage of students come from an international background due regard is given to attempting to create a positive and supportive learning environment. It is also important to ensure the discussion of international students does not collapse into simplistic stereotypes. Without this, there is danger of the development of a pedagogic gap with students struggling to derive significant learning from their higher education experience. Montgomery (2010, p. 15) highlights the potential problem with simplistic stereotyping:

> […] the issue of international students speaking in class and offering answers to lecturers is a case in point; staff may refer to an accepted stereotype of the "South East Asian learner" as a passive learner who is unwilling to offer spoken contribution to a group […] such a generalisation is as unreasonable as saying that "all students are lazy" or, since 11th September, "all Muslims are terrorists" (Holliday, 2007). These are examples of mass over generalisations.

To overcome simplistic perceptions, it becomes crucial for lecturers to engage with the complexities of prior approaches to teaching and learning that the wide diversity of students bring with them in any predominantly internationalised course. Indeed, Kramsch (1998, p. 30) argues that:

> […] in our days of frequent border crossings, and multilingual multicultural foreign-language classrooms, it is appropriate to rethink the monolingual native speaker norm […]. I propose that we make the intercultural speaker the unmarked form, the infinite of language use, and the monolingual monocultural speaker a slowly disappearing species or a nationalistic myth.

This suggests that pedagogic approaches within internationalised seminar rooms need to become intercultural, fostering an approach which does not see the learning of a British culture as the main aim of the course (Montgomery, 2010). Part of the impetus for developing more responsive learning environments for international students not only comes from the increasing economic imperative for the enrolment of students on

University courses, but also as a result of the emergent field of Scholarship for Teaching and Learning. This focus for pedagogic research emerged through the work of Boyer (1990) in his publication *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. The notion of teaching and learning as being an important area for both research and the development of practice has gathered pace and has begun to consider more elaborate ways of defining what such a field includes. Hutchings and Shulman (1999, p. 13) argued for a conscious shift to emphasise learning over teaching, requiring:

> […] a kind of "going meta", in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions relating to student learning […]. And do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it.

One approach to making such a meta-level analysis central to the development of pedagogy, and thus investigating student learning, is the use of Lesson Study. This is what Stigler and Hiebert (1999) recommended when looking for a method to offer school teachers to explore and improve pedagogy. The literature demonstrating the use of Lesson Study within higher education contexts is currently very small; in a recent literature search carried out for this project, only nine academic papers and one book considering Lesson Study within an HE context could be found. The use of Lesson Study within a university/college context is particularly popular within the USA (e.g. Demir *et al.*, 2012; Dotger, 2011; Alvine *et al.*, 2007), although studies from other countries have also been completed including Denmark (Christiansen *et al.*, 2007), and Australia (Djajadikerta, 2009, 2010). In the majority of cases these studies focus on the development of Lesson Study as a technique for furthering pedagogic understanding of faculty members through professional development, particularly by stressing the collaborative nature of the process. However, two potential insights appear to be absent from these studies:

(1) use of Lesson Study to understand and develop pedagogy within explicitly internationalised contexts; and

(2) direct engagement of students in reflecting on their own needs and in playing an active role in forming their own learning experiences.

The idea of students becoming involved in co-creating curricula and pedagogic approaches has become increasingly popular in higher education over recent years. Kuh *et al.* (2010) argue that student engagement at HE level is crucial if students are to be successful. An example of student engagement is Cook-Sather's (2011) involvement of undergraduate students as consultants in the development of curricula and pedagogic approaches. Her study demonstrated that not only did explicit consultation with students have a positive impact on the practice of lecturers, but also led to a greater level of confidence and learner agency amongst the students. Bovill *et al.* (2011, p. 139 quoting Shulman, 2004) see such an approach as overcoming the all too frequent "pedagogical solitude" which individual planning and teaching can bring. They carry on to identify four characteristics of effective pedagogic development including the voice of students by (Bovill *et al.*, 2011, p. 140):

(1) inviting students to be partners (active and authoritative collaborators) with academic staff in pedagogical planning, thus challenging traditional hierarchies and roles;

(2) supporting dialogue across differences (a position perspective), which yields fresh insights and deeper engagement in teaching and learning;

(3) fostering collaboration through which both academic staff and students take more responsibility for teaching and learning, arriving at new views of both; and

(4) facilitating new relationships between students and academic staff.

Many masters level courses in the UK have a particularly complex nature as there is often a diverse, and predominantly international student body. The lecturers involved in the current project believed that Lesson Study would allow for a serious consideration of the learning experiences of students, leading to change and an improved learning experience. The project reported here was conducted in the 2012-2013 academic year and centred on developing the learning of 26 masters level students who were following an MA in International Education at a university in England. The 26 students came from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds, with only one student being a native English speaker, the others from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Two academic members of staff, who teach on the course, decided to use Lesson Study as a tool for understanding and extending student learning. To understand these complexities it was felt that direct and explicit involvement of students within the Lesson Study process was essential. Two approaches to student participation were included in this study:

(1) Student participation through the use of individual stimulated recall interviews after each of six research seminars.

(2) Groups of students in preliminary planning meetings to inform the preparation of two seminars through discussion of their preferred approaches to learning. This approach was piloted in two of the six research seminars. In addition, they reflected on the success of the seminars after their completion.

Given the background to this study, the main aims of the research were to:

(1) evaluate the quality of students' learning opportunities in "research lesson seminars";

(2) explore student perspectives on their learning experiences; and

(3) evaluate PLS as a vehicle for the development of lecturers' reflective practice, supported by pre- and post-seminar student participation, including individual interviews and group consultations.

Method

This project focused on student learning across three modules of an MA in International Education: Contemporary Issues in International Education, Study Skills and a specialist optional module on pedagogy (followed by nine students) (Figure 1). All students agreed to the research taking place in the modules but only 18 agreed to be active participants i.e. to be observed as case students and to participate in interviews and focus group meetings. We developed a modified Lesson Study cycle, represented in Figure 2 with steps 1, 3, 4 and 7 covering the fundamental aspects of the process, influenced by Lewis' (2002) four-stage structure.

A basic Lesson Study cycle was augmented (see Figure 2) to make it participatory by incorporating consultations and reviews to hear the students' perspectives. Case students who had been observed during each of the six research seminars were asked if they would be willing to complete individual interviews. In all cases the students agreed to this. Students were asked to bring any notes or other artefacts from the seminars to the interviews and these were copied and were also the foundation for

stimulated recall questions (Lyle, 2003) to open reflection and discussion about the learning process they had gone through (step 6 in Figure 2).

As a pilot within the study, we also developed the use of student focus groups for research seminars three and four (see Figure 1). Having identified an initial focus for each of these seminars, the lecturers discussed possible approaches, content and any specific issues they felt needed to be covered within the forthcoming seminar with a group of students (step 2 in Figure 2). This allowed for a collaborative and explicit consideration of the learning challenge, and possible pedagogic approaches from the perspective of the students. Consequently, these discussions played a crucial role in

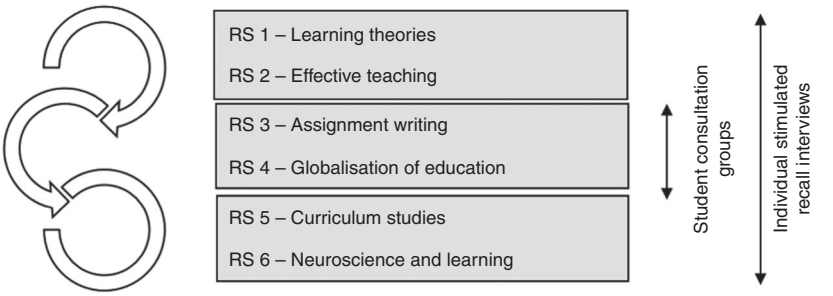

Figure 1.
Content focus for each of the six research seminars (RS) covered during the project

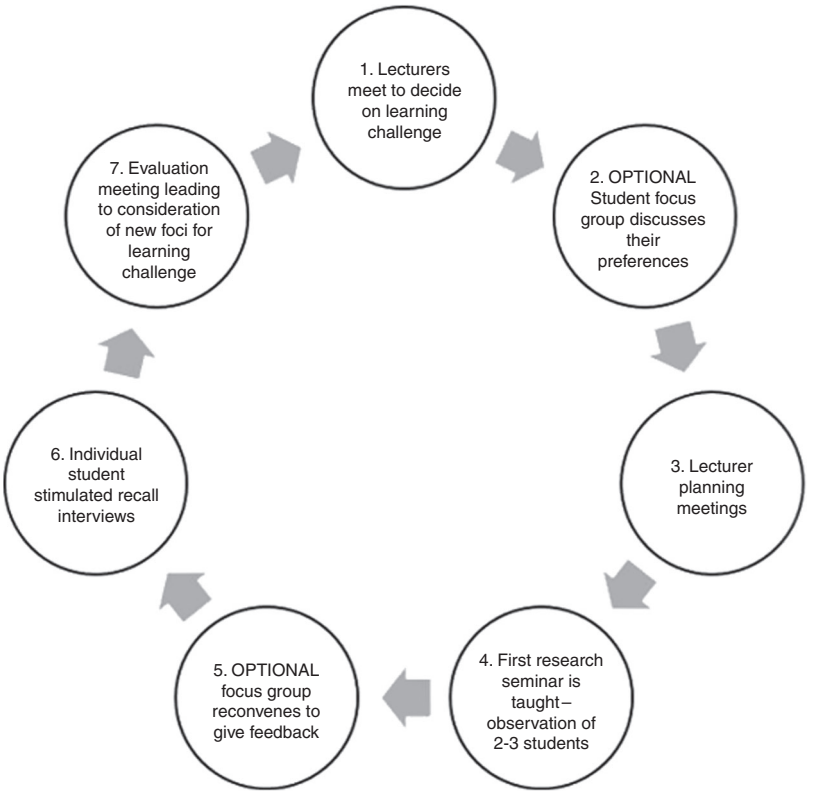

Figure 2.
The Participatory Lesson Study (PLS) cycle

informing the subsequent seminar planning meetings undertaken by the two lecturers. At the end of the research seminar the focus group was reconvened to gain immediate feedback from the students (step 5). This focus group considered how successful the students believed their learning had been and how well the planning had covered the issues they had identified in step 2.

Only after both the focus group and individual interviews had been completed did the lecturers meet to evaluate the research seminar and the degree to which the learning challenge had been met (step 7). This sequence of steps was developed in an attempt to make student involvement explicit and participatory. Figure 2 shows a summary of the participatory cycle which evolved from this project with the focus group steps identified as optional elements.

In developing this participative approach to Lesson Study, the issue of understanding and analysing student learning was central. Whilst Learning Study makes explicit use of variation theory (Marton and Booth, 1997) as a basis for analysing and understanding the process of learning, Lesson Study can be vague in establishing a link between learning and methods of analysis. Cerbin and Kopp (2006), working within an HE context, use an approach called "cognitive empathy" by developing approaches to teaching in the research seminar which make student thinking "visible", in part by planning from a student perspective. Lewis (2002) considers the need to watch eyes and faces, and capture discussion between students. Whilst both of these approaches are important and have potential for observing learning, in neither case will they capture the complexity of the learning process which students experience.

In attempting to base data collection on a more critical foundation regarding the learning process, we have considered the work of Nuthall (2007) and Illeris (2007). Nuthall (2007, p. 158) emphasises the complex process of learning and its relation to teaching:

> […] how students learn from classroom activities is not simply a result of teacher-managed activities, but also the result of students' ongoing relationships with other students and of their own self-created activities or use of resources.

This means that a series of levels interact to make each student's learning highly individualised which Nuthall (2007) characterises as occurring in layers that become increasingly difficult to observe:

(1) a visible layer which is that which is public and teacher-led;

(2) a semi-visible layer which is the student-led culture, relationships and interaction; and

(3) an invisible layer which is that of the mental processes, such as prior learning and working memory that are central to individual sense making.

This last layer is not visible and therefore we need to consider our definition of learning as a starting point for developing a meaningful and critical set of methods for data collection.

Here, we have used the learning theory of Illeris (2007) as a basis for our understanding and capture of the learning process experienced by students. He characterises learning as being the amalgamation of a cognitive dimension which is concerned with content and individual cognitive processes, an emotional dimension which includes elements such as motivation, emotion and a will to learn, what Illeris (2007, p. 24) terms the "[…] mental energy.. needed to carry out a learning process", and

a social dimension which focuses on interaction between the learner and their social and material environment. This means that data capture based on approaches such as observation are still important as they are essential for gaining insight into the social aspects of learning. However, observation of individuals and their behaviours is not able to search inside the individual to gain insights into their cognitive processes. The result of taking this stance is that we must say explicitly that any capture and analysis of the learning process will always be incomplete; to complete research on teaching and learning is always to work with the partial, the incomplete. Whilst we feel that this admission of incomplete analysis is appropriate, we believe there needs to be greater explicit discussion within the Lesson Study research community concerning the processes of learning which inform our understandings of how to observe learning in the complex interactions that occur in classrooms.

Our alignment with Illeris' (2007) theory of learning has direct implications for the methods used to explore the process of learning with participants, and also underpins our desire to develop participative approaches as shown in Table I.

The inclusion of student focus groups is seen as helping the lecturers gain an explicit understanding of student prior learning and which elements in their learning they believe are important for them to concentrate on at that point in time. The stimulated recall interviews, using artefacts from research seminars as a basis for discussion, begin to give insight into the "invisible" worlds (Nuthall, 2007) of students as they engage with the teaching and learning in the research seminar, as well as offering extra insights through student afterthoughts. Any discussion that occurs will obviously be incomplete, as not all elements of the learning experience will be recounted or remembered and some of the experience may well have been subconscious, or will only be made sense of more fully over time. However, to gain direct testimony from students, particularly when triangulated against research seminar artefacts is an important addition to the analysis. These interviews also give the potential to consider the emotional dimension of the learning process, as our experience of this approach to interviewing makes explicit the affective reactions of students to their learning. Meetings, focus groups and interviews were all recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were subjected to several independent readings by the researchers and then emergently coded to highlight the main insights which the project uncovered. The main themes to emerge from the data are listed in Table II.

Step 1: lecturer meeting	Audio recording
Step 2: (research seminars 3 and 4 only) student focus group	Audio recording
Step 3: planning meetings	Audio recording
	Plans
	Resources
Step 4: research seminar	Observation notes
	Student work
	Video Recording
	Audio recording
Step 5: (research seminars 3 and 4 only) student focus group	Audio recording
Step 6: individual stimulated recall interviews	Audio recording
Step 7: evaluation meeting	Audio recording
	Notes
At the end of the cycle individual student interviews	Audio recording

Table I.
Data capture overview

Other methods used to capture the social dimension of learning include the use of video and audio recording as well as observation itself. We stress that this is a process of augmenting data capture rather than the loss of one approach to be replaced by another.

Results

The addition of an explicit participatory element to our use of Lesson Study yielded a number of new perspectives concerning the development of classroom pedagogy. These perspectives included direct discussion with students about the quality of their learning during research lesson seminars and also their own perceptions of their learning experiences. These are reported under the two headings below which relate directly to the first two project research questions and are based on the emergent codes listed in Table I.

Students' reflections on their learning opportunities in "research lesson seminars"

The inclusion of pre-seminar focus groups for research lesson seminars proved invaluable for gaining insights into student needs, thereby improving the quality of their learning opportunities within the seminars. One example of this given below shows some of the student reflections and areas of difficulty in their learning, offering a much clearer picture to lecturers of the learning challenges they were facing (interviewers are labelled J and Q throughout):

> J: Okay. M do you want to add anything?
>
> M: Yes. I'm not sure exactly the difference between the introduction and conclusion. Some introduction would need to describe some background information about our main topic, but the conclusion would also need that. So what's exactly the difference between them and how to write down the conclusion which I need to write a summary or something?
>
> (Excerpt of dialogue between lecturer J and student M in the pre—research seminar focus group before research seminar 3).

In the case of the focus group for research seminar 3, the lecturer who has led this element of learning for a number of years emphasised the difference in focus developed by the students. This led to a very different seminar but one which addressed issues that the students themselves found important, the foci for which were reiterated by the lecturer towards the end of the focus group meeting:

> […] we asked you about what you wanted in this seminar and you talked about structure, literature review, organising your thoughts, limiting the referencing. And you talked about

Table II. Emergent codes relating to student learning and pedagogic approaches

Main themes	Sub-themes
Knowledge development	Curriculum content
	Case studies
Language	Vocabulary development
	Technological aids
Pedagogy	Collaborative approaches
	Discussion
	Pre-sessional work
Development of written work	Structure
	Coherence

> the topic, title and structure and then using the literature to explore what the introduction does etc, looking at coherent arguments, referencing conventions, use of language, what the conclusion has to include and you wanted to look at some past assignments.
>
> (Lecturer Q, pre-research seminar focus group prior to seminar 3).

Likewise, both content and pedagogic approaches were discussed with students before research seminar 4 focusing on globalisation and education:

> J: if I was going to ask you to do something before the session to get you interested in it what kind of things there might be useful?
>
> R: Defining globalisation
>
> I: what factors cause globalisation
>
> J: what kind of activities do you like doing?
>
> C: Group discussion
>
> M: something that involves moving around
>
> R: if there is a video or something that might help
>
> (Discussion between lecturer J and students C, I, M and R in consultation group before research seminar 4).

These student insights then played a major role in the subsequent planning of the seminars by the researchers:

> They asked us to work on introductions and conclusions. So they can give feedback from this. We can highlight some of the linguistic features in that. Then we'll look in general at the structure of the paper to see how it's structured. So they'll have an idea about how to look at position papers and I've got some key questions for position papers which I'll give to them.
>
> (Lecturer Q during preparation for research seminar 3).

Similarly focused discussion took place before research seminar 4:

> Going back to what they asked for, they were interested in the processes of globalisation. They've had that in the pre-session and we're coming back to it at various points during the session. They wanted case studies, and they wanted Finland and Singapore and LEDCs as well […].they said they wanted group discussion which they've got.
>
> (Lecturer J during preparation for research seminar 4).

Following the research seminars, both focus groups and individual interviews gave further detailed insights into the learning experiences of students and how they might be improved further in the future. For example:

> The pre-task was really useful to get ready for today. On the first task I would have liked longer so that I could refine it [assignment outline].
>
> (Student R, post-research seminar 3 focus group).
>
> I mean that would have already have got me thinking about the kind of things you are talking about with certain things would have come within my mind […]. Then we could have spent time on the assignment and then referencing may be a little longer because I think it is important.
>
> (Student E, post-research seminar 3 individual interview).

Not all of the reflections were concerned with the development of activities or skills, but also included feedback on new learning which students found important within their own particular educational contexts. For example, in the extract below, students engaged in a discussion after the fourth seminar concerning national education systems, giving reasons for their preferences for the inclusion of particular national systems whilst also questioning why others had not been used:

> J: Did it go well? Was it useful?
>
> C: I think it was useful, yeah.
>
> R: It was a good activity about different countries' systems.
>
> I: it opened our eyes about systems in different countries and to think about the Singapore education system. The Singapore system is thought of highly and comparing it with other education systems, be able to note the differences […].
>
> J: considering critical differences? Did you enjoy the activities?
>
> R: very useful and many things interesting when comparing different systems, different countries. I was thinking why no China, you chose Singapore why not China?
>
> (Discussion between lecturer J and students C, I, and R in focus group reflection meeting after research seminar 4).

It also became apparent that students were beginning to reassess their understanding of educational concepts, deepening their theoretical insights due to the work they covered during the seminars. Again, this gave useful insights for lecturers into the ways students were developing their theoretical understanding:

> It got me thinking about the whole thing about curriculum and it was really interesting and it was like as if life I discovered. I mean I've known the curriculum, the word curriculum, and I've been working with curriculum for years now, I mean like I said, teaching […]. But then after the lesson, I thought that 'oh, there are things that I didn't know' and like I feel grateful to have discovered that and that I had a very interesting discussion with J after that and I find that really, I find myself being really productive and I like that.
>
> (Student I in individual interview after research seminar 5).

Finally, we were also able to gain evidence as to the success and engagement of students with activities during the research seminars. The dialogue extract below exemplifies evidence gained concerning the use of resources, and also some of the difficulties faced by international students due to language restrictions:

> J: Was the group discussion useful?
>
> C: Using the fact file was good to look and spot the differences, which was good when we were in groups.
>
> R: It was a problem for me and I didn't finish all the papers and I only read the first and half of the second page. A little difficult for me.
>
> (Discussion between lecturer J and students C and R in focus group reflection meeting after research seminar 4).

As a result of such feedback, we began to gain a clearer and more critical understanding about student need and the quality of student learning experiences. They discuss the importance of pre-sessional learning and the inclusion of case studies in relation to

developing their knowledge base and a clear focus on the development of written work. The student focus groups allowed students to play a proactive role in forming these learning experiences for research seminars 3 and 4 by engaging with us to discuss need before sessions, followed by an evaluation of how successful the interventions had been in supporting their learning after the sessions. By discussing student experience in these focus groups we could gain more nuanced insights into the experiences of students during the sessions.

Exploration of student perspectives on their learning experiences

In attempting to understand the learning of students as we have argued above, observation alone may be ineffective without interpretations and opinions from the students themselves. Thus, the use of focus groups and individual interviews allowed us to gain greater depth in understanding the students' perceptions concerning their own participation within the research seminars and their own learning experiences.

One way in which this was achieved was to use students' notes and other artefacts from the seminars together with observation notes as a basis for asking them to recall what they remembered of their own learning during the research seminars. For example, below the lecturer who observed a seminar on effective teaching asked a student about what they were doing and thinking at one particular point during the seminar:

> J: What do you, as he's talking, what, what are you actually thinking about? How do you think you're learning while he sort of explains things?
>
> M: Oh, for the knowledge, may be, mmm, some knowledge I have already read it before from the books-all the articles and, and I note, "Oh, that's right. This is, I have the knowledge' but sometimes, the knowledge I haven't heard before. So, I may need to look at the notes […].
>
> (Lecturer J and student M, individual interview after research seminar 1).

Other insights are more general in nature but more directly consider some of the initial issues which may be relevant to international students getting used to a new learning context. In this particular example, an initial concern about working with others and the expectations and rigours of academic writing are clear initial worries:

> Q: Can you talk a little bit about the challenges that you have here in adjusting to Masters level study?
>
> R: First I think it's how to cooperate with my classmates to find some solutions to some problems. And the second is how to write essays in academic style. It troubled me. So I think it's a long way for me to learn. So I prepare notebook to write down some sentence structure and the words, vocabulary list.
>
> (Lecturer Q and student R, individual interview after research seminar 1).

Another feature, particularly noted within individual interviews, was discussion about the role of technology in learning. Whilst the pedagogic approaches taken by both lecturers are not built upon systematic use of technologies within face-to-face seminars, there is nevertheless almost ubiquitous use of technologies, often utilised in informal ways. One such example is the following exchange where a student explains how she uses an iPhone to supplement her learning during research seminar 2:

> J: And were you using that [iphone] during the seminar?

E: I do use it. Yeah. Like often I have the slides on my iPhone.

J: And is that to view or can you actually make notes on your iPhone?

E: No. Just to view it. Like just before class, like going back, but before the class of open most of the things. But now I'm using to like now Q comes and he gives us the papers, but before class I didn't have it and I didn't print it. So I just had on my iPhone, but I read it and like this stuff we just read, I just read as well in the unit and I've read Shepard. Then I just sort of moved on.

(Lecturer J and student E, individual interview after research seminar 2).

The integrated use of technology, particularly in supporting language development, was also a regular theme. Such insights are particularly valuable given that one of the lecturers prior to engagement with Lesson Study had believed that regular use of smart phones and tablets by students was evidence of a lack of engagement, assuming that students were texting or e-mailing friends outside of the seminar. However, as the focus group example below demonstrates some students (student I) will attempt to extend their knowledge base within the seminar itself by using search engines to follow up core content, whilst many students develop their own digital glossaries of technical terms which they refer to during seminars, and also sometimes translate to physical handouts as convenient linguistic prompts:

I: I tried to Google something that will interest me –

Q: Mm.

I: - and much more emphasis on the connections between neuroscience and learning.

Q: Mm – and you were looking this up in the seminar?

I: During the seminar.

Q: Yes. Yes – during the seminar? Yes.

I: – while listening – multitasking.

Q: So, you were listening and looking things up, you think? Yes, but M, you were listening, were you?

M: Err yes […] one thing I use my phone, some special vocabulary to help me understand, yes.

Q: So you used the iPhone for vocabulary?

M: Yes, and, in my iPhone there is a word list.

Q: A glossary?

M: Yes.

Q: You have a glossary, yes?

M: Vocabulary and sometimes if I have time during my lunchtime, I can, I remember them.

(Lecturer Q and students I and M in a post-research seminar group interview after research seminar 6).

By engaging with students in these ways, it is far easier to gain a fuller and critical understanding of student learning experiences, leading to a more informed and more nuanced understanding of both the learning strategies and learning challenges which students experience. Such insights can then be used to guide subsequent planning.

Discussion: PLS as a vehicle for the development of lecturers' reflective practice

One of the aims of this research project was to evaluate a form of PLS as a vehicle for the development of lecturers' reflective practice. As suggested at the start of this paper, much of the pedagogic work of lecturers has traditionally been characterised by "pedagogic solitude" (Shulman, 2004 in Bovill *et al.*, 2011). PLS offers a major departure from this view of teaching and learning, casting pedagogy as a collaborative endeavour which allows deeper exploration and reflection from the discussions which result. However, whilst the basic approach of Lesson Study is based on a deeper engagement with pedagogic issues it also makes a series of assumptions. Learning challenges are identified on the basis of lecturer perceptions and the chosen approaches to learning likewise are made in isolation from the experiences and preferences of students. As such, the pedagogic solitude of Shulman (2004) is only partially broken, for whilst collaboration may address the solitude between lecturers, there is still a potential barrier between lecturers and students. PLS triangulates the experience and has the potential to break down pedagogic solitude further. As the examples given here demonstrate, direct discussion and participation of students, especially when they come from diverse academic backgrounds, offers invaluable insights for lecturers. We were able to use student perceptions as a foundational element in seminar planning, leading to pedagogic experiences which were identifiably different to those we had prepared in the past, when relying solely on our own experiences and insights. As such, we believe there is strong evidence demonstrating that PLS is a positive model for lecturer reflective practice (a consideration of which was the third aim of this research).

Building upon insights concerning student participation from writers such as Bovill *et al.* (2011) and Cook-Sather (2011), a "Participatory Lesson Study" approach begins to break down the barriers between lecturers and students. The results from this case study demonstrate that the lecturers involved gained additional insights into the processes of teaching and learning which occur within their seminar rooms through engaging students in individual interviews and through focus group participation in the planning and evaluation of research seminars. We argue that this is particularly important when working with international students who, as Okorocha (2010) states, may experience a number of barriers to learning in the early period of living and studying in a new host country. By engaging with students, there is greater potential for understanding and addressing the wide spectrum of learning challenges that such students face in these early weeks.

Potential weaknesses still remain in this emerging approach to Lesson Study. We believe that it is important to continue to question what constitutes the very process of learning itself. In much of our current research, we have used the three dimensions of learning (cognitive, emotional and social),developed by Illeris (2007). However, in considering the exploratory and incomplete nature of the current study, we understand that learning is a difficult process both to define and analyse, and is highly complex when considered within internationalised academic contexts due to linguistic and cultural diversity. These complexities in turn lead to the need for more critical approaches to understanding learning and teaching. In an international HE context, questions of acculturation (how and to what end), centrality of language in both teaching and learning, differentiation in learning (an under-debated issue at HE level) and the embedding of technology in the seminar room are all central issues that influence the planning of any teaching and require further research. Finally, we also need to consider how Lesson Study might help us understand the processes of learning

beyond the seminar room as these alternative spaces and processes are crucial to the success of students at Masters level, but are often poorly understood, both in their own right and in conjunction with face-to-face sessions.

Insights and implications from the study

The results of this study suggest that PLS has potential as an excellent vehicle for developing lecturers' reflective practice. The discussions undertaken with students have given a number of new insights into our work as practitioners and researchers. Discussion about the learning process itself, and particularly the various pedagogic approaches which students find valuable, has added greatly to our understanding as teachers. These include insights into students' concerns and approaches to dealing with language issues and also how technology is routinely embedded within their learning. Finally, discussion around pre-and post-seminar learning has allowed us to begin to generate new ideas concerning broader learning ecologies and blended approaches to extend our pedagogic practices. Given that the original aims were to consider how PLS might add to our own reflective practice and the learning opportunities of students, we believe we have established a solid foundation for investigating this participative approach to Lesson Study and intend to extend it further over the coming academic years.

PLS has the potential to both extend and deepen our understanding of learning and teaching, particularly where we are working with groups of international students. In the future, we intend to investigate further participatory approaches to advance the inclusion of student perceptions within the planning and evaluation of learning. One such development might be to include volunteers in the planning and evaluation meetings for research lesson seminars (steps 3 and 7 in Figure 2), as well as involvement in participatory observation. These further steps would further extend students' role in developing and evaluating pedagogy. Even at this early stage in our research after only two research seminars that involved students in the planning and evaluation of seminars through focus group discussion, we feel confident that our own pedagogic practice has been positively impacted and that a participatory approach to Lesson Study allows for new insights to be gained concerning the nature and process of learning by students, and as a consequence our practice as teachers.

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