

Lesson Study as a Collaborative Research Tool Enhancing Inclusive Pedagogy in Higher Education



By Seán Bracken & Jáima Pinheiro de Oliveira,
University of Worcester & São Paulo State University (UNESP)

Access to higher education (HE) has increased dramatically over the past 20 or so years: some 50 per cent of the population in high-to-middle-income countries now attend either further or higher education for two years or more (Marginson, 2016). This upward trend is also evident in developing countries, where efforts to extend the participation of marginalised groups in HE have been incorporated into legislation.

Discussing HE in Brazil, Costa-Renders (2019, p. 163) identified a seven-fold increase, from 5,078 to 35,891, in the number of students identified as having a disability between 2005 and 2015. According to Brazil's 2015 'inclusion law' (law N.13.146), a specific percentage of places in HE must now be reserved for students identified as having a disability, as well as for students of indigenous or Afro-Brazilian heritage (Costa-Renders, 2019).

Similarly, in the UK, Layer (2019) has found that the effects of educational massification, along with the affordances of technological innovations, have impacted significantly on the nature of student learning requirements. These have, in turn, informed policies and practices aimed at extending accessibility within HE.

Within this fast-changing context, in which there are shared global initiatives to extend flexible modes of learning and develop options for 'universal HE', there is a social justice imperative to identify shared understandings of how students from more diverse sociocultural and (dis)ability backgrounds – who constitute a new norm – experience their learning, and how university personnel can learn from these insights. There are currently a limited number of studies elucidating how learning spaces typified by student diversities are experienced from a number of complementary perspectives, including: the incorporation of student voice; insights from

specialist support services; the views of library and information staff; and the research reflections of academics within the discipline of education studies and teacher training.

In both the UK and in Brazil, intersections of poverty and disability proved particularly challenging for some students.

In identifying how best to capture the dynamic nature of ongoing learning, a research project, which was funded by the British Academy, enabled researchers in Brazil and the UK to draw insights from universal design for learning (see Bracken & Novak, 2019) and lesson study (see Dudley, 2011). This provided a pragmatic, process-oriented research strategy while responding to 'wicked problems' requiring solutions from a diversity of institutional stakeholders (Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, & Çetinkaya, 2013). The lesson study format followed the model outlined by Dudley (2011, p. 5).

The research included a professional development dimension, whereby experts in the field of lesson study shared their research and insights with practitioners and researchers at workshops held in the UK and Brazil. Following this capacity-building exercise, the small-scale research was carried out in one university in each jurisdiction throughout the 2018/19 academic year.