The use of Lesson Study to engage pre-service teachers in a positive peer-learning climate

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Aim:

The aim of this research was to adopt a model of lesson study (LS) (Elliott, 2012; Lewis et al., 2009), that was owned and managed entirely by pre-service teachers (PSTs) to convey its potential in facilitating mutual spaces of learning between peers (Lamb et al., 2013). Whilst there is steadily growing interest within initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, few projects have managed to use full cycles of LS in ITE due to constraints most commonly associated with time and workloads’ (Cajkler et al., 2013:540). The incorporation of lesson study into school-based elements of training could offer PST’s autonomy in their professional learning, beyond the formal hierarchial relationships between school-based mentors and PSTs (Le Cornu, 2005). Fuller’s (1969) ‘phases of concern’ conceptualisation of teacher development consisting of self concerns task concerns and impact concerns informed the study.

Method:

Participants were Secondary Physical Education PSTs (n=17; males = 9, females = 8), enrolled onto a 38 week Master’s level University Postgraduate Certificate in Education course (PGCE) in eastern England.

An action research methodology was adopted for the study.

During two school placements PSTs engaged in two separate lesson study opportunities.

PSTs completed a paired first placement of six weeks, conducting a lesson study together with an emphasis on working collaboratively whilst developing observation skills.

Each PST selected a lesson to solo teach and their peer acted as a non-participant observer and recorded the lesson on an iPad.

Immediately afterwards, the pair watched the recorded lesson together, engaging in a joint evaluative conversation and review of the lesson.

A template of questions associated with pedagogical skills was available to support their discourse on the lesson.

PSTs completed an individual second placement of fifteen weeks, conducting a lesson study with another peer based in a different school (see diagram below), paired through convenience sampling.

Data was obtained through a multi-method approach including a group discussion board, individual questionnaires at the end of each lesson study cycle and individual interviews at the end of the course.

Findings:

- All data sources endorsed a range of successful outcomes of engaging in lesson study: ‘Seeing someone do it and then having the confidence to go away and take that lesson plan that you had developped together, to then apply, I think was really good, ‘cause I would have had a go at teaching soft ball, but I would not have been as confident as I was knowing that this was sort of tried and tested’ (Interview 3: female PST)

- 100% of the PSTs felt the lesson study task had contributed in a positive way to their professional development during their training.

- A common message reinforced the perceived benefits associated with cycles of action: planning and observing an initial lesson, reviewing and adapting the original plan and delivering a revised plan.

- The opportunity to reflect between each of the cycles was acknowledged as an essential element of the process.

- The findings indicated increased levels of confidence, especially in reducing self and task concerns (Fuller, 1969), contributing towards a much stronger transition as newly qualified teachers.

Conclusions:

The findings contribute to existing literature exploring the effectiveness and impact of lesson study within initial teacher education. Collaboration with a peer at the same stage of training was viewed as easing the pressure PSTs felt during school placements. The mutually supportive learning environment created pedagogy space beyond the formal mentoring process, allowing for risk-taking with revised lesson approaches and empowering the PSTs to learn through their teaching. They developed confidence in learning from and with peers, especially acquiring subject knowledge, developing planning, understanding learners’ needs and embedding reflective practice as they planned, taught, observed, discussed and evaluated lessons.