

Using lesson study and students' voices as strategies for teacher development

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ABSTRACT

Across Europe the biggest challenge facing teachers is that of responding to learner diversity. This paper discusses the potential importance of using lesson study and students' voices as strategies for teacher development, in order to address this challenge. It is based on initial findings from a three-year European Union study in three countries (Spain, Portugal, UK), involving eight secondary schools and five universities. Illustrative examples from the different contexts are used to demonstrate how an engagement with the views of the students, embedded within the lesson study approach, can have an impact on teachers' thinking and practices in such a way so as to develop more inclusive practices.



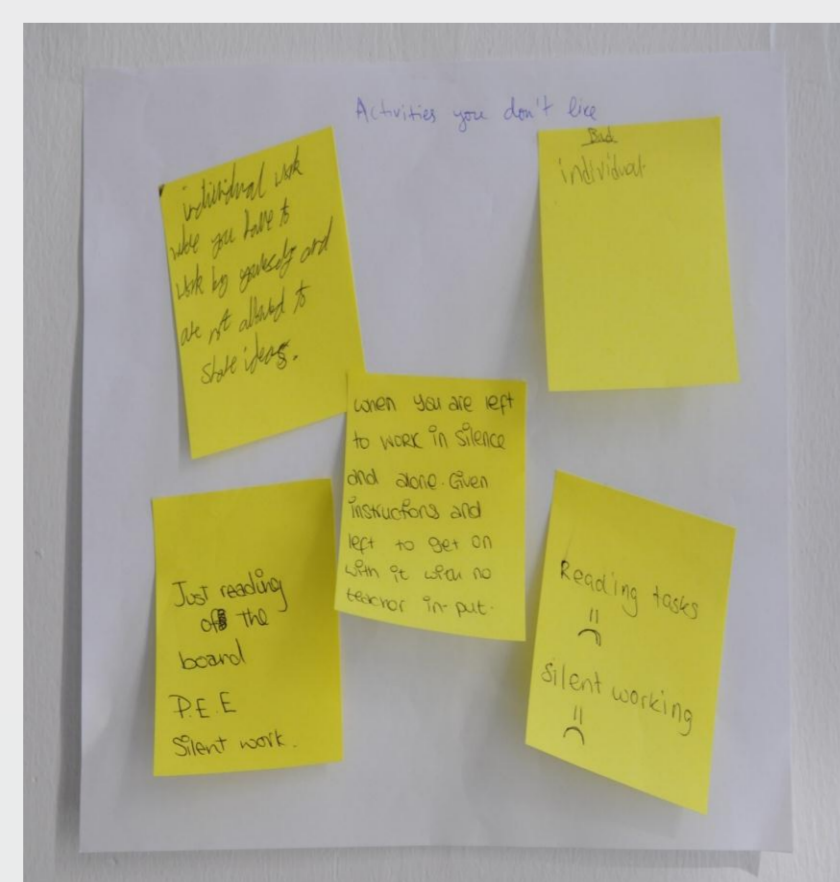
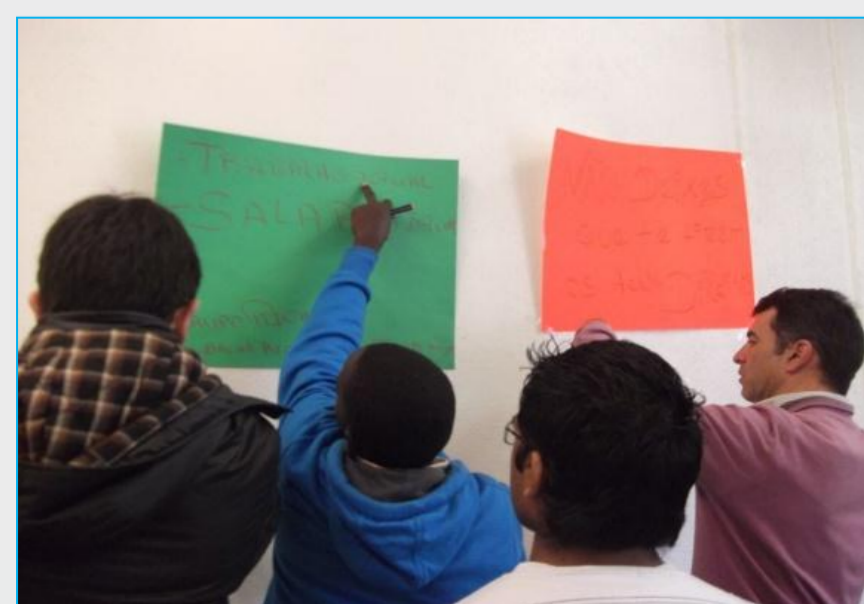
PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project is a three-year project (2011-2014), funded by the European Union Executive Agency. It addresses the crucial agenda of responding to learner diversity through the creation of an innovative approach to in-service teacher development.

The project involves processes of collaborative action research and aims to have a direct impact on teachers' thinking and practices and on students' participation.

The study sets out to address the following question:

- How can teachers develop more inclusive practices by engaging with the views of the students?



THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

The research is influenced by theories of inclusive education that place emphasis on the quality of education provided for *all* children (Ainscow, 1999; Corbett, 1997; Corbett, 2001; Farrell, 2000; Lewis, 1995) and are concerned with issues of human rights, equal opportunities and social justice (Armstrong et al., 2000). In addition, it uses the 'organisational paradigm' suggested by Clark et al. (1995), which focuses on "identifying what features within schools facilitate such responses and what processes can be initiated which would bring those features about" (p. 79).

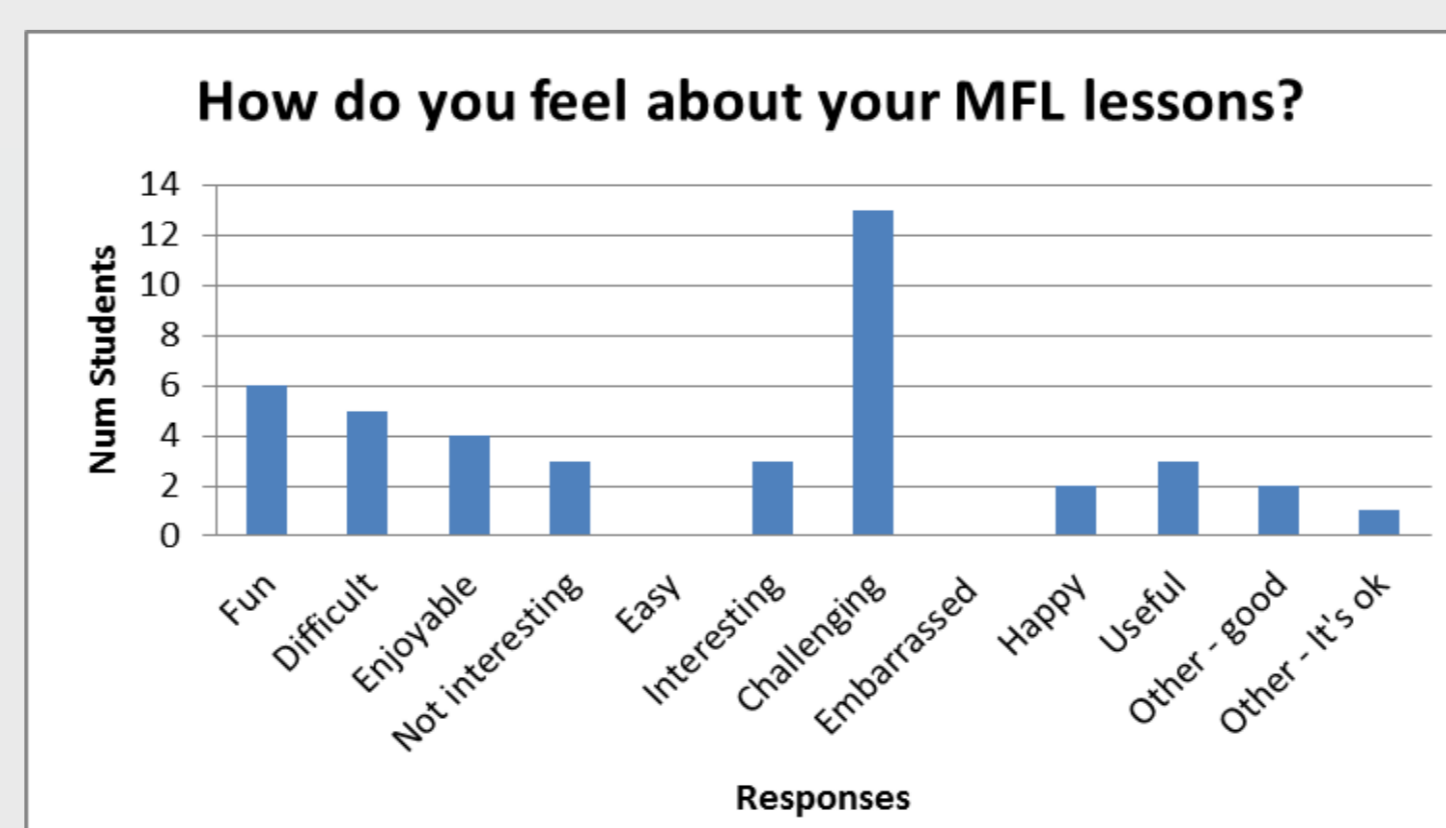
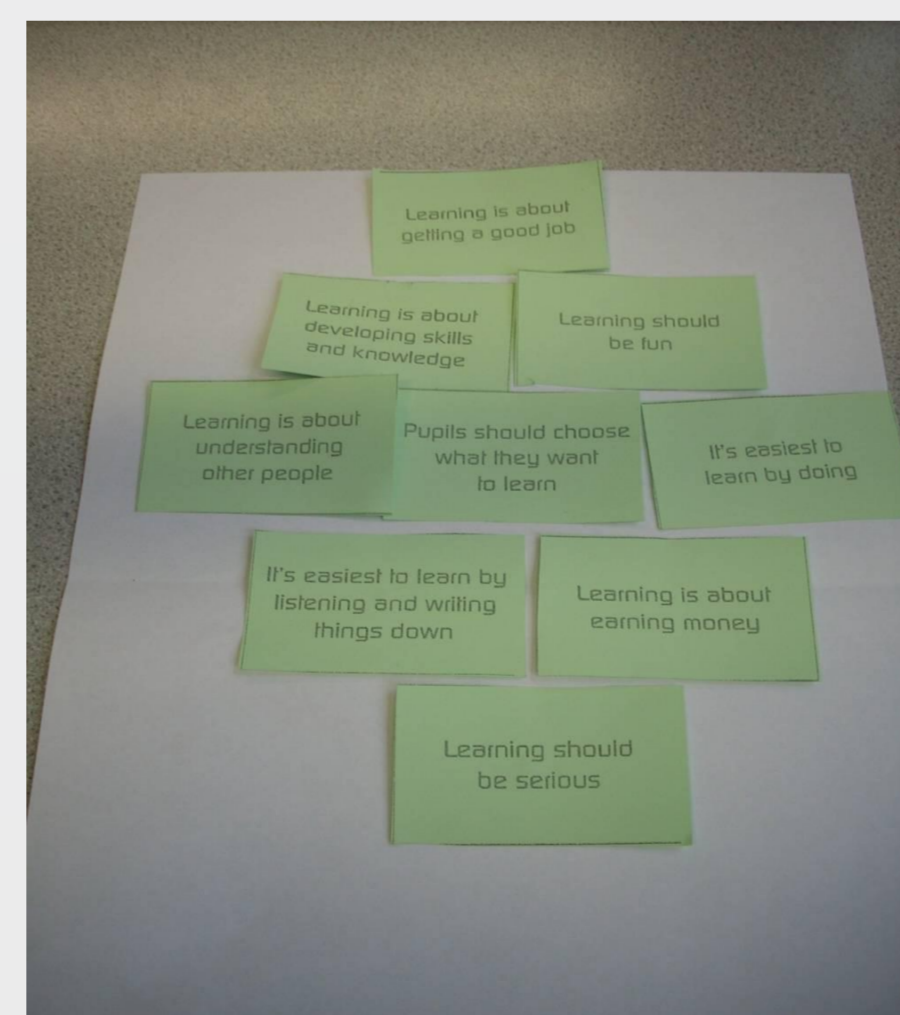
Bearing these ideas in mind, the rationale on which this research was developed views the idea of listening to students as a key strategy for developing inclusive education (Messiou, 2012).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study makes use of collaborative action research processes. It also combines two approaches: the use of students' views and lesson study, a strategy that involves teams of teachers in working together to develop their practices (Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler, 2002).

Students' views are collected by a range of means, including both quantitative and qualitative methods such as sociograms, questionnaires, interviews and visual images. An initial action plan was developed to be used by all schools in the first phase of the study (pilot phase). Researchers monitored the progress and assisted with data collection in each of the schools. The initial action plan consisted of the following seven steps:

1. Form a working group
2. Analyse diversity in the school
3. Collect the views of students
4. Plan the research lesson
5. Teach the research lesson
6. Interview students
7. Identify implications



INITIAL FINDINGS

Our analysis of these developments points to themes that have started to emerge across the schools and countries. These relate to:

- the importance of leadership support in such efforts;
- the challenges associated with the use of such approaches, including
- issues of time and commitment on the part of teachers, and the challenges of using students' voices in order to develop further aspects of learning and teaching;
- teachers' resistance on listening to students' suggestions; and
- the benefits that such an approach can have on teachers in terms of changing their thinking and practices



CONCLUSIONS

Anderson and Herr (1994) argue that "students are everywhere in schools, and yet they are too often invisible to the adults who work there" (p. 59). They refer to the work of Fine (1991) who suggests that schools engage in an active process of 'silencing' students through their policies and practices so as to smooth over social and economic contradictions. Through this project opportunities for students' authentic involvement are explained. These opportunities are not just about issues that relate to students' participation in social activities or structures within the schools, such as school councils, for example, but relate to issues regarding relationships, teacher attitudes, and aspects of learning and teaching. The study also demonstrates how research knowledge can be constructed in close collaboration with practitioners and students, and as a result, how this can have a direct impact within school contexts, especially on teachers' thinking and practices.

For more information:

<http://studentsvoices.eu/>

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