

Lesson study as a pedagogical practice in higher education from an inclusive perspective: strategies and resources indicated by professors

Lesson study como prática pedagógica no ensino superior a partir de uma perspectiva inclusiva: estratégias e recursos indicados por docentes

Lesson study como práctica pedagógica en la educación superior desde una perspectiva inclusiva: estrategias y recursos indicados por los profesores

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Abstract: Lesson Study as a strategy for inclusive pedagogical practices has been used in some countries as a form of collaborative work, involving both teachers and students; and fosters discussions during the implementation of teaching practices. This article aims to present an excerpt of the results of an investigation using Lesson Study conducted in Brazil, simultaneously with the University of Worcester. The analysis indicated the resources and strategies suggested by the professors during the realization of a cycle of the Lesson Study approach. The study concluded that the opportunity to research in a university context increased the understanding of inclusive education among the involved agents.

Keywords: Higher education. Teacher training. School inclusion.

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Resumo: O *Lesson Study* como estratégia para práticas pedagógicas inclusivas tem sido utilizado em alguns países como forma de trabalho colaborativo, envolvendo professores e alunos; e fomenta discussões durante a implementação das práticas de ensino. Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar um recorte dos resultados de uma investigação utilizando o *Lesson Study* realizado no Brasil, simultaneamente com a Universidade de Worcester. A análise indicou os recursos e estratégias sugeridos pelos docentes durante a realização de um ciclo da abordagem do *Lesson Study*. O estudo concluiu que a oportunidade de pesquisar em contexto universitário aumentou a compreensão da educação inclusiva entre os agentes envolvidos.

Palavras-chave: Ensino superior. Treinamento de professor. Inclusão escolar.

Resumen: El *Lesson Study* como estrategia de prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas ha sido utilizado en algunos países como una forma de trabajo colaborativo, comprendiendo tanto a docentes como a estudiantes; y fomenta discusiones durante la implementación de las prácticas docentes. Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar un extracto de los resultados de una investigación utilizando el *Lesson Study* realizado en Brasil, simultáneamente con la Universidad de Worcester. El análisis indicó los recursos y estrategias sugeridas por los profesores durante la realización de un ciclo del enfoque *Lesson Study*. El estudio concluyó que la oportunidad de investigar en un contexto universitario aumentó la comprensión de la educación inclusiva entre los agentes involucrados.

Palabras clave: Educación superior. Formación de profesores. Inclusión escolar.

1 Introduction

This study addresses the strategies proposed by Lesson Study as a support for planning academic activities targeted at teachers who intend to adopt or contribute to the adoption of an inclusive perspective in Higher Education. In general, Lesson Study or *Estudos de Aula*, as it was translated in Brazil and Portugal, is a pedagogical practice with a focus on collaboration among teachers and, especially, on the teachers' and students' reflection on the teaching practices adopted for the content taught in classes. In some studies, the expression *Estudos da Lição* is also found.

This pedagogical strategy has been predominantly used in Basic Education and most authors adopt a social character of knowledge in which reflections and discussions involve all actors in the process (teachers and students). This characteristic brings the Lesson Study closer to interactionist studies, which consider students' prior knowledge to produce and reproduce new knowledge, based on teachers' guidance and encouragement (Sofos & Darra, 2015).

According to Dudley (2013), this teaching practice has its roots in Japan, has been extended to China and other regions of Asia and the Pacific in the last century, and currently, its use is also verified in the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Peter Dudley is one of the main references of the practice and, in his current studies, he has highlighted Lesson Study to improve aspects of continuing education and professional development of teachers in the United Kingdom. Thus, the present research intends to contribute to this context, considering the innovative character of this practice in Brazil (Richit & Ponte, 2020).

The concern with teaching practices leads us to aspects of the professional development of teachers. For Oliveira-Formosinho (2009), a plurality of terms is used to explain this development. In the words of the author, permanent education, continuous training, in-service training, recycling, professional development, teacher development, and others, are some of the used expressions, most often as synonyms (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2009). Hobold (2018) warns of the fact that the concept of teachers' professional development cannot be regarded separately from the concept of continuing education (Hobold, 2018). More specifically, Oliveira-Formosinho (2009) defines professional development as a continuing process or teaching practices, teacher-centered or a group of teachers in interaction, including formal and informal moments, concerned about promoting educational beneficial changes for students, families, and communities.

For Contreras (2012), teaching professionalism is related to performance, to the values and intentions that govern the teaching process. It is also linked to the objectives aimed to develop in the exercise of the teaching profession, translating the way this professional conceives and lives the work concretely.

When mentioning the teacher's knowledge necessary to act, Tardif (2014) also comments that teachers themselves, during the exercise of their functions and in the practice of their profession, develop specific knowledge, based on their daily work, on the knowledge of their environment and in the relationships established with students and professional colleagues. Tardif (2014) names this knowledge as experiential or practical and reiterates that this knowledge incorporates individual and collective experiences and, therefore, corroborates Marcelo's understanding (2009) when he claims that these experiences help to define us and define others.

In view of the exposed, we have to bear in mind that pedagogical practices need to have a function and an intention (Franco, 2008). From those, they will be organized around an objective that involves a group and, therefore, they must necessarily have an interactive character that involves that group. Although reaching all the expectations of this group or representing it is challenging, this needs to be considered. In addition, all these aspects, involved in the pedagogical practices, necessarily have to permeate the conception of Pedagogy and, especially, for scientific concerns (Franco, 2008).

Regarding the more specific context of School Inclusion, we can state that the Lesson Study is in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which prioritize the teacher-student interaction, through three essential aspects: student's engagement in activity proposals; different ways of presenting the content to these students; and different forms of representation (expression) of learning. The last aspect offers flexibility to one of the greatest teachers' concerns, which is fair assessments, compatible with students' expectations and different learning styles (Hanesworth; Bracken & Elkington, 2019).

This interactionist focus is extremely important for students who are preparing to become teachers, that is, for undergraduates, because the methodologies to which they are exposed in Higher Education must provide teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, which are subject to use in different classroom contexts and, especially, for the diversity in that classroom. Therefore, the search for effective pedagogical practices that allow everyone to expose their learning potentials should always be a central concern of Education.

As for conducting research with the Lesson Study, we highlight that, in general, Lesson Study strategies are more commonly applied in the area of didactics of mathematics and didactics of science (Doig & Groves, 2011). These authors commented that research in these areas points to the potential of this methodology in promoting professional teaching knowledge. This is highlighted, especially because of the collaborative actions among teachers and the better reception of scientific knowledge by students.

Three fundamental aspects for successful improvement of teaching aspects were highlighted by Akiba, Murata, Howard and Wilkinson (2019) after conducting an investigation using Lesson Study: a) the focus of the facilitators on thinking/concerning about the student; b) the quality of the materials and; c) the duration of Lesson Study. The authors commented that a longer period for the completion of Lesson Study may be associated with more positive results regarding the teachers' learning or improvement.

A literature review on Lesson Study, conducted by Kanellopoulou and Darra (2018), indicated some important specific aspects. Some of these aspects stand out: a) the use of this

method in different places is possible, as long as their cultural differences are respected (Cowen, 2006) and, therefore, adapting it. Specifically about this, in Brazil, preliminary and/or pilot studies have been carried out, so that these specificities begin to be discussed, especially on the issues that involve in-service teacher training (Richit & Ponte, 2020). In addition, Kanellopoulou and Darra (2018) also point out: b) Lesson Study can mean an educational innovation in some places when relationships or articulations with other countries are promoted (Phillips, 2006). Regarding this aspect, we stress that this research, now described in this paper, prioritized this relationship, both regarding its specific data collection and in other aspects throughout its development, such as the establishment of other partnerships and future projects focusing on Universal Design for Learning.

Other aspects highlighted by the authors are: c) adequate teaching planning must be established, as well as its proper implementation, reinforcing the active role of teachers and students (Sofos & Darra, 2015); d) the possibility of turning Lesson Study into educational policies; e) the equal participation of teachers is considered a necessary condition for the successful Lesson Study; f) open-ended questions facilitate the free expression of the participants' opinions about teaching, as well as preparatory and reflective meetings. These points are also highlighted in the planning structure of Lesson Study (Dudley, 2011); g) Lesson Study develops collaboration and communication among teachers (Chong & Kong, 2012) and strengthens friendly interpersonal relationships; among others. This is perhaps one of the most evident and important points for in-service training or for the professional development of the teachers involved.

Considering this context, the objective of this paper is to describe the preparation phases of Lesson Study on the use of teaching methodologies with an inclusive perspective, in a university context. In addition, the strategies and resources indicated by two professors during the Cycle 1 of this planned Lesson Study is analyzed.

2 Methodological path

With a predominantly qualitative approach, this research was exploratory and descriptive (Gil, 2008) and the research instruments used for data collection consisted of interviews, observation, and field notes (Viana, 2003).

All ethical aspects were considered for conducting the research. The institutional authorization and approval by the Institutional Ethics Committee were observed. The analysis presented in this paper is part of a larger study coordinated by the first author and supervised by the second author of this paper, with the collaboration of the third and fourth authors, and funded by the British Academy.

Part of the data obtained from the collection carried out in Brazil was selected for this study. The larger research also contemplated the effects of using this strategy in comparison with the United Kingdom, considering the differences in teacher training in Brazil and the United Kingdom, regarding the professionals' work and professionalism, such as socio-cultural, political, and didactic aspects, among others.

Two university professors (Anna and Beatrice, fictional names) participated in this analysis. They were responsible for undergraduate and graduate courses (*stricto sensu* and *lato sensu*). Most of these subjects were directly related to Special Education and Inclusive Education. The main criteria for selecting the participants were: working in Higher Education, teaching subjects in the area of Special Education, and voluntarily participating in the study, as a previous study on the Lesson Study procedures was required. The data on these professors' profiles are presented in Table 1, below:

Table 1 - Participating professor profiles

Variable	Participating professor	
	Anna	Beatrice
Age/Years	41	52
Experience working in Special Education/years	16	29
Experience working in higher education/years	15	26

Source: by the authors.

A group of twelve students also participated in this stage, three male and nine female. The average age of this group was 29 years, and the main criteria used to form this group were: regular enrollment at the university (undergraduate and/or graduate); enrollment in any course taught by the professors participating in the study, or regular participation in a study group in the area of Special Education; and availability for voluntary participation. Another fundamental criterion for this group was the presence of students with some type of marker (social, linguistic, ethnic, neuromotor, intellectual, sensory, among others) related to the development or the learning process, respecting, in a reasonable way, the proportion of these people in relation to the presence of these markers in the university context.

Four students met this criterion, with the following characteristics: deafness, dyslexia, low socioeconomic status, and physical disability. This criterion was intended to enable the formation of a heterogeneous group and to obtain specific data related to these markers, from these students or from the discussions provided by their presence at this stage of the data collection.

As for the data collection and analysis instruments, all the precautions indicated in the literature of the area were observed (Manzini, 2014, 2020; Triviños, 1987), especially those aimed at the sequence of questions, based on theories and hypotheses, which converge with the research objectives. In addition, the instruments used throughout the research were reviewed by all researchers involved in the larger research. These interviews were conducted in a classroom, recorded with an audio recorder, and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Regarding the observation episodes, they were recorded through filming and also analyzed using specific instruments, built and perfected throughout the research (Oliveira, Miura & Bracken, 2019). In each phase, field notes were also made by the professor who attended the class being taught. It is important to highlight that this filming material constitutes the main element for the reflections by the professors, during the planning and conduct of each phase of any Lesson Study and, mainly, for what Dudley (2011, 2013) names the post-class discussion convention. In our case, these records were analyzed through their content, prioritizing thematic categories, according to the objectives of the larger research. For this article, data from the category related to strategies and resources indicated by Professor Anna (Phase 1 of Lesson Study) will be presented and discussed.

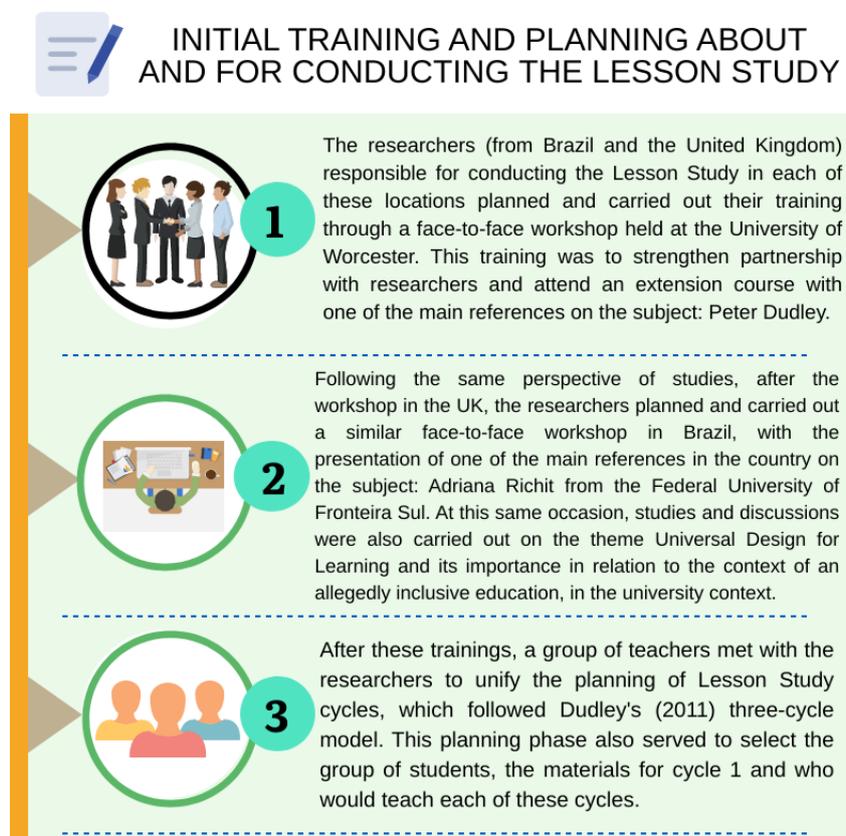
3 Results and discussion

To answer the first objective of the research, firstly, the preparation phases of Lesson Study will be described, based on Dudley (2011). Then, to answer the second proposed objective, the main resources and strategies indicated by the professors during the completion of cycle 1 of Lesson Study are presented in Figure 3.

3.1 Preparation cycles of Lesson Study

Next, we indicate, in Figures 1 and 2, the initial planning carried out for our Lesson Study, and an illustration of how cycle 1 took place, based on the studies by Dudley (2011, 2013) who indicated the performance of three cycles. Following this model, the next cycle is always perfected in its didactic-pedagogical proposal, based on the discussions and interviews of the previous cycle.

Figure 1 - Initial training and planning about and for Lesson Study

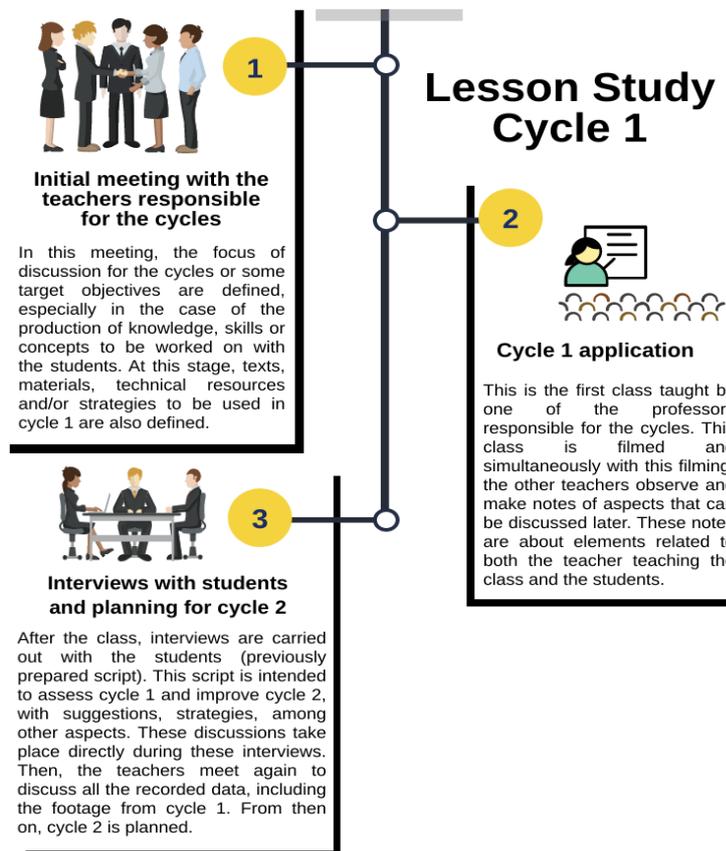


Source: by the authors.

Figure 1 shows that, initially, it was necessary to train researchers and other teachers to deepen knowledge on the theme. This initial contact also served to verify and confirm the teachers' interest in voluntarily participating in the research and the construction and execution of Lesson Study. Then, these plans moved on to a more specific step, and already related to the possibilities of discussions and even materials to be used in cycle 1. Aspects such as semi-structured interviews and scripts for observation and discussion of the cycles were elaborated in these stages (Oliveira, Miura & Bracken, 2019). As the theme is broad and most likely to lead to lively debates and animated discussions, in stage 3, the researchers and professors also alluded to initial themes and texts for the cycle 1 proposal.

Next, in Figure 2, we present the constitution of cycle 1 of our Lesson Study. This description is present in the three cycles indicated by Dudley (2011, 2013). The author comments that up to three cycles can be conducted, as this will depend on the outlined and achieved objectives during the application of the cycles. The more discussions on the data and improvement of cycles, the less necessary the cycles are.

Figure 2 - Lesson Study Cycle 1



Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on the three cycles of Dudley (2011).

This model of planning, action, and reflection and the dialogical nature of the research leads to an awareness of all the main stakeholders about how students responded to possible gaps in the way knowledge is generated and transformed inside and outside the learning environments.

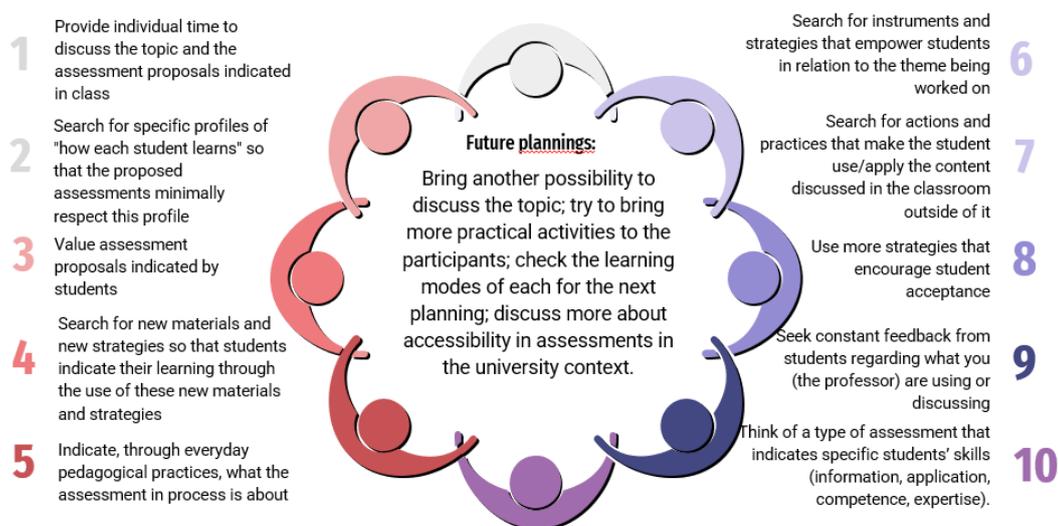
In the third (reflective) stage, termed as the post-class discussion convention by Dudley (2011, 2013), the analysis is carried out through a meeting with all the teachers responsible for the cycles and, when possible, with the presence of the researchers as well. At this meeting, there is an intense analysis and discussion of the data obtained from the observations, recordings, including transcripts of the students' interviews. Considering that the focus of these interviews was to obtain tips, strategies, and other aspects they found it important to improve the discussions of that class with an inclusive perspective, for the next cycle. Some of the aspects indicated by the students were highlighted in the study by Oliveira, Bracken and Nakano (2021), and those indicated by the teachers after all the analyzes of cycle 1, the focus of this paper, are shown in Figure 3, below.

Oliveira, Bracken and Nakano (2021) verified that, during the observations and in the post-observation discussions, the students consistently expressed the need to articulate more clearly how the content being taught related to the expectations of the assessment processes. The assessment was a central point during the application of cycle 1 and the discussions arising from it. The teachers responsible for Lesson Study were attentive to extending the range of facilitating strategies to ensure that, with a growing diversity of students, the assessment items and learning aids were more

explicit, although there seemed to be room for greater clarity on the best way to support each student's requests, more individually or separately.

3.2 Resources and strategies indicated by the teachers during Lesson Study cycle 1

Figure 3 - Teachers' indicators for lesson study's next cycles



Source: by the authors.

As observed from the data in Figure 3, assessments were widely debated during cycle 1. As we mentioned before, the general theme of Lesson Study was "Teaching and learning methodologies with an inclusive perspective in Higher Education". All of these indicators provided the basis for carrying out cycle 2 and, of course, when it was not possible to put them all into practice, this could also be done to some extent in cycle 3, as all professors responsible for the application of the cycles participated in the data discussion and analysis phase, carried out after the application of the cycle. Because it is a reflection, some of this produced knowledge may not be mobilized by everyone at first, but the fact that they are present in these discussions allows for such mobilizations.

For this reason, we warn to the fact that the stages of this research allowed the professors to turn their view to the teaching practices of planning and assessment that can contribute to the reflection and improvement of these practices (Shulman, 1987), without disregarding the countless aspects involved in teacher training (Gatti, 2009; Gauthier, Martineau, Desbiens, Malo & Simard, 2006; Mizukami, 2004; Roldão, 2014; Tardif, 2014, among others).

These discussions indicate that it is possible to consider Lesson Study as a possibility of teaching practice that allows improving the teaching performance, together with the process of representing the curricular content. For this reason, some authors who use Lesson Study often cite the principles pointed out by Shulman (1987) concerning the process of teaching training and/or teaching-learning. This author has been one of the greatest influences of the last two decades regarding research as a training and professional development policy in the teaching scope (Mizukami, 2004).

In addition, the opportunity to be able to analyze and design aspects that can improve a class before it occurs and with the collaboration of other professionals and students is unique. The

mobilization of knowledge involved in these practices, undoubtedly, can provide a pedagogical conception that affects most students, a purpose that should be pursued by all. Franco (2013) reinforces that this purpose with the presence of this knowledge demonstrates a concept of Pedagogy, which must precede pedagogical practices themselves.

Finally, it is a professional learning process, which, as Tardif (2014) comments, occurs in the exercise of their functions and in the practice of their professions, based on daily work, knowledge on their environment, and the relationships established with students and professional colleagues.

4 Conclusion

This paper aimed at describing the preparation stages of a Lesson Study on the use of teaching methodologies with an inclusive perspective, in a university context, and analyzing the strategies and resources indicated by two professors while carrying out cycle 1 of this Lesson Study. We consider that our goals were achieved, and we reinforce that Lesson Study allows teachers to share knowledge and resources, allude to various perspectives to understand many aspects involved in the teaching-learning process and support the development of strategies to promote it (Dudley, 2013).

In addition, the collected data allow us to infer that teachers were involved in joint decision-making and developed a high sense of joint responsibility for teaching and learning the subject as an essential precondition for the process of reflection and professional learning.

On the other hand, we learned how complex the implementation of collaborative practice, in general (in an institution), is. As engaged and collaborative as professors behave during such practice, its implementation is an aspiration, with numerous challenges, among which we highlight: time constraints, planning, and limited opportunities for professional development.

In general, the opportunity to conduct this research has considerably increased our understanding of inclusive education in each of the scenarios. This fact resulted in the determination to move forward with the integration of Universal Design for Learning to strengthen the social and learning outcomes of students from social minorities. At the heart of our Lesson Study findings, we have also concluded that understanding the realities experienced by the students occurs through the development of reliable dialogues, which, in turn, encourage the joint creation of knowledge capable of promoting inclusive education.

The authors recommend an in-depth use of Lesson Study methodological strategy in Higher Education. In a recent paper, Oliveira *et al.* (2022) pointed out some categories and strategies that can be adopted by HE professors to facilitate the organization of team teaching, with an inclusive perspective. These strategies consider possibilities of presenting and assessing content in different ways, in such a way that they respect the specific needs of students, which may also include the involvement of the support team in places where they are present.

Another key point indicated in the results and which deserves close attention is the need for teachers to anticipate information about assessment proposals and be aware of specific rights that many of these students have, such as: flexibility of time to carry out a certain assessment, provision of translated texts, in case of a language other than the majority language in the community in question.

We also highlight two specific indicators that the organization of Lesson Study cycles allowed to make teaching practices more inclusive: the possibility of using the structure of Lesson

Study to analyze what can be effective to improve the development and presentation of the course, and how the elements observed in a team can be used as support for the students' experiences.

As an ideal implication of our larger research, we hope that at the end of cycle 3, these aspects and the resources and strategies indicated by the professors and the students reach a pedagogical and methodological level of discussion, which will allow alluding about high and low technology strategies, products and services that have a close relationship with UDL (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).

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