

Contributions of Multidisciplinary Peer Observation to Lecturers' Reflective Practices

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ABSTRACT

The goals of this paper are to explain the extent to which multidisciplinary peer observation practices may improve reflection among lecturers concerning their pedagogical practices. and identify the kind of reflection it improves. In this sense, the paper presents a study with the objective of determining the importance that lecturers give to reflection upon their pedagogical practices as they are engaged in a multidisciplinary peer observation program. Data were collected through interviews and observation records. The results suggest a confirmation, among other aspects, of a commitment to a reflective discourse both in the work carried out by lecturers and as it concerns the pedagogical issues of their training.

Keywords: Higher Education; lecturers' reflective practices; multidisciplinary peer observation;

INTRODUCTION

European education policies that arose from the Bologna process have been shaping the challenges facing universities regarding growing student diversity and accountability to social mandates (European Commission, 2013). Pedagogical practices of lecturers have been occupying a growing concern among institutional politics as they are closely related to Higher Education (HE) achievement rates, dropout prevention, HE democratization (Dias, 2015), and institutional quality.

Thus, the tradition of valuing scientific training and research as the only issues that matter concerning, HE lecturers' performance (Esteves, 2010) is changing both at the personal and institutional levels. Nevertheless, in the Portuguese landscape, lecturers begin teaching without pedagogical-specific training. The use of reflection procedures regarding the pedagogical action of HE lecturers has the potential to improve their performance (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005; Sullivan et al., 2012). This study aims to confirm this.

Pedagogical action is the first axis of professional development of lecturers who focus on the issues related to proposing and delivering courses and classes (Esteves, 2010) and is the topic of the present study. The other axes are the educational boards, management responsibilities, and professional rank the lecturer occupies. However, these other axes are beyond the scope of the present text.

Lecturers' reflection on their performance comes from the general idea of teachers as intellectual and transforming workers (Giroux, 1988) and follows a movement initiated by Schön (1987), who considers teachers to be reflective professionals, able to change their own practices through the power of reflection. Zeichner (1993) noted the same concern when he proposed a teachers' training model aimed at developing a critical and reflective approach to the dominant ideology underlying curricula and school organizations. In other work (2010), this author pointed out the importance of knowing if teachers are reflecting on their practices, but also how and on which issues they reflect. Even though the aforementioned studies concerned teachers from basic and secondary levels of education, it is arguable that reflective practices could be used in HE.

In fact, as Vieira et al. (2017) state, these concerns are important in HE due to the banalization of reflective thinking in pedagogical discourse that frequently leads to the assumption that reflection is a natural part of participation. Therefore, it is important to distinguish levels of reflection that just adapt some practices in order to solve small problems from those kinds of reflection that could challenge key aspects of teaching and learning tasks. This is a key issue, not only to promote reflection among lecturers and use it to enhance lecturers' training, but

also to make effective the changes needed to implement the pedagogical paradigm required by the Bologna process.

According to Cosh (1998), reflection that serves a learning purpose needs to include “not only reflection in action but also reflection on action, both before and after teaching, and creative reflection - on theories and procedures” (Cosh, 1998, 173). Lopes (2019) stresses the need for teachers’ education to teach teachers to apply theory to real-world situations, thus leading, through reflection on the act of teaching, a new identity for instructors. In addition, professional development must change to meet the contemporary challenges of HE. To reach such a goal, it is important to highlight the factors that facilitate the awareness movement as presented by Kortaghen (2010) in the ALACT model (the abbreviation stands for action, looking back, awareness, creating alternatives, and trial).

The ALACT model was built to sequentially organize the relationship between theory and action in order to improve the process of reflection. The reflective challenge rests between “looking back” and “awareness.” How can we successfully go from the looking back phase to awareness? What are the factors that allow and facilitate this passage? And to what extent are such factors related to peer observation?

The ALACT model was utilized to improve the theoretical frame on which present work seem to be deficient, namely by adding a new question related to the power of multidisciplinary peer observation to improve reflection.

Three main issues seem to be important in lecturers’ reflections: the relationship between theory and practice; the relationship with others, colleagues and or students; and the increasingly important awareness concerning teaching practices such as teaching effectiveness, measured by student achievement rates, and class appraisals. In addition, lecturers’ reflective practices depend on their professional development and awareness of their roles. The literature reveals connections among these issues (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond,2005; Peel, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between theory and practice

Following Korthagen’s (2010) ideas, the most important factor that allows for reflective teaching is a close relationship between theory and practice. Lopes (2019) agrees. He states that whenever issues to be learned are applicable to concrete tasks to be accomplished, or when practices raise new questions that are supposed to be highlighted, theory and practice come together. This means that lecturers should be aware and must have conditions that allow them to go deeper into their practices by the utilizing the power of theory. How may theory improve

pedagogical practices? Schön (1987) suggests the relation between these two sides of knowledge production must be rethought because academia's emphasis on technical rationality undervalues knowledge gained through practice. Zeichner (2010) follows Schön and argues understanding practice is useful. He avoids the extreme, on one hand, that prioritizes technical rationality over theory, and on the other hand, the position that practice is the best and only way to learn.

The logic of this relationship must be designed in close connection with research and an intervention purpose; in addition, the relationship must also establish the intersubjective environment that characterizes teaching and the institutional landscape (Sousa, Lopes & Boyd, 2018). This is in line with the European Science Foundation's recommendations concerning strengthening the identity of academics as it centers around the concept of "teacher researchers" (Pleschová et al., 2012)

The relationship with others colleagues

Relationships with colleagues and collaborative work have been frequently identified as crucial factors of professional development among teachers of all educational levels (Vieira et al, 2017). Within these relationships, peer observations of teaching have been reported as a key issue to developing deeper and more trusting relationships among peers, "colleagues who trust and respect each other can be valuable in helping improve each other's teaching" (Cosh, 1998, 177).

In addition, peer observation was described in some studies as promoting new ways of providing teachers with work support, mainly because the focus was less on the observed and more on the active self-development of the observer (Torres, Lopes, Valente & Mouraz, 2017). In addition, giving support to change practices (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005) resulted in a conceptual expansion and lasting change to teaching practices (Bell & Mladenovic, 2015).

From the curriculum development perspective, peer observation could also strengthen relationships among lecturers and be an important factor for curriculum effectiveness, as it enables lecturers to observe how other colleagues organize their lectures, face contingencies, and support students' engagement with the discipline-specific curriculum (Bell & Mladenovic, 2015). Moreover, peer observations have implications for enhancing teachers' reflections on their beliefs about learning and teaching, in conjunction with participation in continuing professional development (de Vries et al., 2013).

Less frequent are the studies conducted to assess the importance of peer observation from a collective or departmental perspective (O'Keefe et al., 2009). Nevertheless, peer observation is referred to as a path to improving institutional cohesion (Mouraz & Pêgo, 2017).

Student achievement rates and class appraisals

The third factor that is important to increase awareness concerning teaching practices is teaching effectiveness, measured by student achievement rates and students' class appraisals. As Boyd and Harris (2010) (among many others) state, a good teacher is one who reflects on the learning outcomes and achievement rates of his/her students. However, there is no direct connection between student achievement rates or students' class appraisals and peer observation. Nevertheless, peer observation forms usually include a category related to students' behaviour or class climate; this could be understood as a measure of teaching effectiveness. For instance, in a study conducted among engineering lecturers using a classroom observation system to facilitate the adoption of active learning methodologies in engineering education, results confirm the process distinguishes pedagogical practices based on active learning principles from those based on a traditional exposition model. Researchers could conclude that lecturers using active learning principles were more effective and students learned more and better than those students who were taught using a traditional exposition model (Williams & Carvalho, 2010). Therefore, it is possible to see peer observation and reflection concerning lecturer – student interaction as a measure to prevent student failure.

In sum, these factors are important factors to promote lecturers' reflection regarding their teaching tasks but are also informal training opportunities for lecturers. The purpose of the present paper goes further than these informal occasions of training as it aims to discuss the potential of multidisciplinary peer observation to improve the awareness of pedagogical practice that reflection inspires.

METHODS

A Peer Observation of Teaching (MPOT) programme with a multidisciplinary nature has been implemented since 2011 under the name "Peer to Peer." (Mouraz & Pêgo, 2017). Every semester, lecturers from 14 faculties (UO) of University are invited to participate in the program that runs in a voluntary basis. The first step of the programme is a session that brings participants together and provides information on the operation of the program. In the second step, quartets are organised with two pairs of lecturers of two different faculties, in which each lecturer observes a class from a colleague of the same faculty and another class from a colleague of a different faculty. Roles are reversed and the two observers are then observed under the same conditions. Thus, all quartet members are observers and observed to emphasise the symmetrical character of relationship among participants.

The observation cycles also involve pre-observation and post-observation moments. The post observation moment is the occasion to perform reflective analysis among quartet members. Emphasis is placed on the importance of feedback, and on the associated communication skills, in order to foster reflection and professional development among lecturers (Mouraz & Pêgo, 2017). In order to stimulate reflection for the observers, the training aspect associated with the observer's role is addressed through the use of a specific observation form to be completed anonymously during and post-observation. The third step of the program is the presentation of results during which time, the Peer to Peer participants get together again to analyze and discuss the results of the observation guidelines and share experiences.

Ethical issues are important as sensitive material regarding lecturers' behavior is reported on observation forms. The lecturers upload their forms without names of either observer or observee.

Aiming to research the effects of multidisciplinary peer observation practices, this paper focuses on the improvement of reflection among lecturers concerning their pedagogical practices. To achieve this broad aim two research questions are outlined:

1 – What effect does multidisciplinary peer observation of teaching have on reflection practices of lecturers?

2 – What kind of reflection does multidisciplinary peer observation improve?

Data were collected from the observation forms and from interviews with the MPOT participants. In total, 63 observation forms were collected concerning MPOT performed during the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years; twenty-four MPOT participants during the life of the program, from 2011, were interviewed.

The observation forms include four sets of questions. The first set addresses course and class information. The second set of questions, to be answered during class observation, requires lecturers to quantitatively score several predetermined items of five dimensions: i) class structure; ii) class organization; iii) class climate; iv) content; and v) teacher's attitude. A third set of questions, inspired by the work of Vieira and colleagues (2004), to be answered post-observation, invites the observer to compare the observed class with her/his own classes. The fourth section covered the post-observation reflective discussion. The present paper uses information gathered from the last two sets of questions.

In the interviews, some personal and professional data were obtained, as well as data about the participation of the lecturers in the MPOT program. The lecturers were then asked about the effects of their participation on their professional practices and on the institutional practices of their faculty. In addition, some perspectives about contributions of the multidisciplinary nature of the program were asked.

Data collected from 2012 to 2014, and from the interviews conducted in 2014, were subjected to a content analysis (qualitative data and N-VIVO software, v.10). For purposes of analysis, the registration unit was the sentence or the paragraph, as the minimum unit of meaning. To this end, a set of categories in line with the data collected was defined and used as the first approach to the material under analysis. Some emergent subcategories appeared during the analysis development and were added to the previous structure. At the completion of the analysis, two main dimensions were codified as important to the aim of this paper: the existence of reflective activities and the contribution of MPOT to improving reflection.

RESULTS

Results are presented following the two dimensions of content analysis structure that were considered relevant to the present discussion: the existence of reflective activities and the contribution of MPOT to improving reflection (summarized in Tables 1 and 2).

The existence of reflective activities

The existence of reflective activities was divided into two categories that were used to understand the situations in which reflection arises, specifically, a joint or an individual circumstance.

The joined reflection was analyzed under two subcategories that arose from the material: working with peers – appreciation and pedagogical aspects. The first subcategory was organized to encompass communication within the quartet, and included the issues of constraints and difficulties, contribution of multidisciplinary practices, and sharing opportunities. The second category, pedagogical aspects, was organized according to lecturer attitude, class climate, content, structure, and organization. the relationship between theory and practice; the relationship with others: colleagues and or students; and the important increasing awareness concerning teaching practices such as teaching effectiveness, measured by student achievement rates and classes appraisals

Concerning the first subcategory, working with peers - appreciation, all interviewees indicated the most relevant theme related to communication within the quartet is that of the politeness of the quartet members. Members were always pleasant and made positive criticisms, probably because quartet members were colleagues who were making their first contact with each other. One interviewee mentioned that when the observed class is bad or not so good, the observer gives the respective feedback in polite way. This will simultaneously have an indirect benefit to the observer because in the future the observer will remember and try to avoid the mistake that was observed in the observed class.

“I think they (lecturers) learned because they have observed (...) so there is an indirect learning, I cannot do this because I didn’t like, but I cannot be impolite, I must say in a gentle way, if you do like that...”

Table 1:
Dimension one: categories and subcategories

Reflective activities	Joint reflection	
		Working with peers - appreciation
		Communication within the quartet
		Constraints and Difficulties
		Contribution of multidisciplinary practices
		Sharing opportunity
		Pedagogical aspects
		Lecture attitude
		Class climate
		Contents
		Structure
	Organisation	
	Individual reflection	
		Comparative approaches among practices
		Organic Unity/ Faculty (UO) comparison
Identification of pedagogical issues that can be improved		
Limitations to pedagogical changes that were recognised as important		

One of the most important constraints and difficulties noted in the observations was the lack of time to do a deep post-observation joint reflection, as the post-observation time was more focused on completing the observation form than on doing a real critique of the observed class. An interviewee mentioned the difficulties of giving feedback to more experienced colleagues. Another interviewee referred to the multidisciplinary feature of the programme as the main difficulty to produce pertinent reflections upon teaching.

“Hardly the advice which underpins the observation of pairs can generate a relevant reflection if we are from different areas and from different faculties.”

A contrary opinion was expressed in the appreciation subcategory. Other lecturers described the post-observation joint reflection as an opportunity to share experiences and compare strategies due to the multidisciplinary nature of the peer-to-peer program.

“The final joint reflection was (...) particularly interesting and useful because it enabled exchange of pedagogical practices of each quartet member and to reflect about the possibility and viability of explore the application (...) to other scientific areas.”

Concerning the subcategory pedagogical aspects, most comments were related to the lecturer’s attitude, namely vivacity and dynamism to promote student motivation, capability of knowledge systematization during class, interaction with students, speaking at the proper speed, validating student class participation, and promoting student autonomy. These issues were pointed to as the key topics of classes observed as well as difficulties shown by some lecturers.

In general, there was a coincident opinion regarding the pedagogical aspects that were considered important among lecturers regarding to deliver an effective class. “I concluded that it is important to have clarity and dynamism of presentation, have time to expose, time to ask questions, and time for students take questions home”.

Additionally, there was a set of remarks concerning voice, gestures, lecturers’ positions in the classroom, and the closeness of lecturers to the students that were noted as significant in spite of their simple characteristics.

Another issue related to pedagogical aspects is class climate. The students’ motivation or lack thereof and the way this determines students’ behavior summarizes the axes of understanding of class climate. Other adjectives such as students’ commitment and class progress were referred to as determinants of a successful class climate. One interviewee noted that, in the quartet joined reflection, the lack of motivation was attributed only to students. For this participant, the reflection was superficial as it did not relate to other aspects connected with the teaching and learning process.

“reflection was quite superficial, without being made any relationship (...) with the perception of the importance of the discipline within the general scope of the course, the worked contents, the methodology or the evaluation procedures ”.

Within the subcategory pedagogical aspects, subject matter was noted as an important but beyond the scope of the participant’s expertise as observers did not belong to the same fields of knowledge. Nevertheless, some reflections were

made related to including personal research findings in the subject matter and that students should be shown the usefulness of the From Peer-to-Peer program.

Relating to class structure that includes class goals and skills to be developed by students, all participants agreed these aspects were present in the classes observed. One participant noted other issues such as the establishment of a clear alignment structure from the goals to the content, methodology, and assessment, which could be an improvement emerging from reflection. The same lecturer emphasized that there had been a reflection regarding class organization and the need to improve students' participation, and that this could be achieved by doing a summary at the end of class.

Individual reflection was analyzed under four subcategories: comparative approach among practices; the UO comparison; the identification of pedagogical issues that can be improved, and the limitation to pedagogical change.

Concerning the first subcategory, comparative approaches among practices, the main themes are related to the different uses of technology and resources by the lecturer. Related to technologies, it seems that two situations were observed, as follows: (1) classrooms in which technology was used effectively, and (2) classroom in which technology was underutilized. In the first situation, observers who were not familiar with technology seemed to be favorably impressed with the use of technology. In the second situation, observers were sometimes surprised that technology was not used effectively.

(1) "I am against the use of slides in class. But (...) the colleagues that I observed, used it very well, (...) it made me somehow change a bit of opinion and realize that technology can be well used".

(2) "I think that the audio-visual and projection by the visual impact have, perhaps, made us use much less the pen, and even forget it. However, its use in some situations can be very helpful."

The aims of courses were discussed and reflected upon including technological differences. In fact, the first statement was common (three interviewees alluded to this issue) and it reveals that pedagogical efficacy and effectiveness are the main reason to use information and communication technologies (ICT). However, two interviewees noted the importance of doing explanations slowly (with old fashioned resources) and presenting the schematic production as a process, making the discussion easier for students to follow during classes.

The role of lecturer within the class was another issue of comparison highlighted by participants in the peer observation programme. Several roles were identified among observed lecturers; participants roughly distinguished between those individuals who are guides of students' learning and those who are mainly workers that actively teach.

“And I was there as the person who helped them along the way. But students do not see the teacher this way. They cannot get there. That was one thing that I became aware [of]. Students do not see the teacher this way. They expect the teacher to be a teacher, and we need to somehow make the class ownership”.

This assumption could be related to the relationship between lecturers and students and students’ expectations. What came up after the reflection was, for some lecturers, an awareness of the impact of their closeness to students: some think that it is a very important issue that allows for better knowledge regarding students’ abilities and difficulties; others think that students neither need, nor expect, such proximity.

Furthermore, lecturers stated that these differences depend on class type, students’ behavior, and course tasks and criteria. As lecturers found out, type of classes, such as laboratorial classes, require teachers to perform a different role, different from the demonstrative and traditional way. In the lab, the lecturer is closer to students and their difficulties, and can offer them hands-on support to help them complete the tasks they are to do in the lab. Course tasks and criteria introduce different exigencies to teachers based on the Faculty in which they are based. MPOT participants realized this was due to the multidisciplinary feature of the program. In fact, these kinds of reflections were expected as the lecturers involved came from different scientific fields and teaching traditions.

“I realized the importance of laboratorial work for students. There, the teacher's role is completely different. In a class where I expose, I answer questions from the students.” “In a laboratorial class, the relationship between teacher and students is of quite different nature”.

Concerning the second subcategory, the UO comparison, statements note the differences among Faculties related to organizational features and regimens. Issues like punctuality, compulsory assistance, class participation, and the creation of new sections of classes when many students wish to enroll, differentiate UO in spite of belonging the same university.

The most interesting issue regarding the comparison among UOs is related to the pre-conceptions of lecturers regarding other fields of knowledge that they had the opportunity to observe in the MPOT program.

“It allowed me to confront different ways of teaching, and began to look at them in another way (...) Having different conditions and the objectives underlying them is that determine whether they are good or bad (...) if they result or not in students learning. This project gave me that confidence, even surpassing some prejudice, the stereotypes that eventually I would have on what are the practices of our colleagues in other faculties.”

As to the identification of pedagogical issues that can be improved, suggestions could be organized into those that lecturers consider easy to include in their own classes and those they did not realize are important until the MPOT experience. Practices, such as the position of the teacher inside the room, the information on slides, the inflection in the voice, the way to organize work groups, and other small strategies were easily understood as ways to change lecturers' habits.

“(…) Because we realize that there are other ways of doing and that we can experience.”

“I never thought if it was important to be closer to the door or close the window ... I had never [been] made aware of that”.

“The ways to manage the intervention/participation of the working groups that do not present the same day is one of the issues that concerns me. Understand the strategies used by other colleagues to engage these students would be very interesting for me”.

“Put too much information on the slides, which can cause students inattention”.

“I learned that it is very important when we are exposed to vary the tone of voice (...) and it's worth (...) ask students on the subject that we are exposed”.

“[A] strategy that I found quite good, is from time to time make purposeful mistakes that could lead students to participate in correcting them.”

Concerning broad problems of teaching, the lack of students' motivation was raised by only one of the interviewees; he expected the quartet proposals to solve his problem. MPOT did not solve his own known limitation, probably because of the limited number of observations.

“What I think is the main weakness in my performance has never been approached in the peer to peer: is student motivation. (...) I think I still could not get to all students, and peer to peer has not made me suggestions to that effect. Of course, this is understandable, because one or two observations [do] not allow [someone] to cover everything”.

The limitations to pedagogical change that were recognized as important are mainly due to time constraints and individual or institutional characteristics of changes.

The contribution of MPOT to reflection improvement.

Table 2- Dimension two: categories and subcategories

MPOT evaluation	Aspects to improve	
	Internal	
		Quality of reflection
		Final meeting of the MPOT
	Strong aspects	
	Impact on reflective practices	
		Encouraging critical and reflective thinking
		Possibility of joint reflection

Time or lack thereof is currently referred to as the main problem that impeaches teachers’ pedagogical changes; this is related to the time required by the tasks that teachers are supposed to perform: research, teaching, and department or university service. Given all the other demands made on lecturers, teaching is frequently considered the least important of their tasks.

“I think that, first of all, we are teachers of young people (...) but then I think that my time is already being spent on management, Scientific Council, Economics group research center, already I am disperse by so many things!”

“Individual limitations are also depending [on] individual perspectives of career developing and [the] importance of pedagogical issues within this path. Therefore, time, as explained above, is crucial but it could be manageable if teachers see teaching [it] as an opportunity to improve their careers or not.”

Diversity of observed experiences is mentioned by some as another limitation to improve pedagogical changes.

“We now find ourselves constrained by time, by incredible pressure at the level of research work. (...) Teaching is what is less valued. (...) If we all are very militant and proactive, this improves. And, indeed, there are lacking other circumstances for this to improve.”

“Implies a profound change that moves a lot with our identities, with what we do and what we think we do well. (...) It is very difficult to pass this level of what is possible individual change to a more general change. (...) In the absence of mechanisms of mediation between individual changes and institutional changes, we end up staying closed in our tiniest changes.”

MPOT evaluation respecting the reflective activities included two subcategories, namely, aspects to improve internal character, such as, the quality of reflection and the final meeting of the MPOT, and the strong aspects that impact reflective practices, namely, encouraging critical and reflective thinking and possibility of joint reflection.

Lecturers claimed that more important than observations to change their practices should be discussions about what was observed and the reasons for certain recommended practices. The criticisms arising from discussions within the quartets are described as relevant to achieving awareness of the aspects to improve, but probably in some cases, awareness was lacking because apparently the effects were not visible.

“The discussion should focus on what this is about, and it is not necessarily observed to change what lectures do, but discuss why people do what they do.”

“I took my individual conclusions, but there was no assessment, or rather a reflection that would allow [me] to draw some general conclusions.”

“This idea of ‘critical friend’, focuses more on the critical and less on friend.”

“For me, the most important experience within the quartet, is the criticism and suggestions that we share between us.”

“I think there was no visible effects.”

Another internal aspect that pointed out relevant activities to improve reflective is the final meeting of the MPOT. Interviewers think that the meeting should be an opportunity for a critical discussion and not only a presentation of results.

“And this, from the point of view of sharing, prowled around these final sessions in which there was a display of results. But I think it was little. We lack this critical component. It was not to be friendly or ceases to be, is to be critical.”

“It should be to promote reflection and less to improve results.”

Concerning the strong factors that impact on reflective practices, encouraging critical and reflective thinking and the possibility of joint reflection was appreciated by several participants.

“Beyond the confrontation with the practice of other lecturers, program induces a reflective exercise on their own teaching practice, which proved to be very stimulating.”

“The ability to discuss and reflect together and seek the best solutions/outputs for a common concern to all - the continuous improvement of teaching/learning in HE.”

DISCUSSION

For some participants, the multidisciplinary peer observation gives them the opportunity to share experiences and compare strategies, whereas for others the multidisciplinary feature of the program is the main difficulty to obtaining pertinent reflections upon teaching.

Related to class structure, including class goals and skills to be developed by students, all participants agreed that these aspects were present in the observed classes. Other issues were noted as important but not present within the classes observed, such as students' commitment. It is possible to conclude that these issues are quite relevant for the vast majority of teachers and could lead to a broad reflection regarding their importance.

Nevertheless, there was consensus that the reflection was superficial and in general. A deep criticism and discussion were not achieved within some quartets. This is in line with difficulties stated regarding a certain lack of trust caused by the occasional character of the program. If programs could be more systematic and lecturers could be together more often than three compulsory observations, a more trusting relationship could be more established. This is in agreement with Peel (2005), who studied the use of the peer observation of teaching (POT) techniques and argued that classroom observation alone is not enough to promote the improvement of teaching in the classroom. An active commitment with pedagogical theory, purposeful critical reflection on classroom practice, and challenging conventions through shared critical reflection is required.

Another argument used by some participants related to the difficulty to observe some classes from other fields of knowledge; this could be another reason for superficial reflection, as participants could not discuss the close relations between subject matter and some pedagogical and curricular options. Moreover, the lack of formal pedagogical training of some lecturers pushes individuals to go further in a theoretical discussion regarding what was observed.

Another issue that arose in the lecturers' discourses related to the circumstance of MPOT – it is a personal decision to be part of the program and the effects remain within personal practices. The departmental character of MPOT is absent and the commonality of purpose and perceptions about what is good teaching rests within the quartet. This is in line with Hammersley-Fletcher & Osmond's (2005) statements regarding the fact that PO usually moves lecturers beyond a position in which they feel the process is simply about the content and mechanics of the lesson being taught. If it is the reflective process in which the greatest inroads into the quality of learning and teaching are seen, then reflection needs to be emphasized for individual lecturers across the entire campus.

A second set of findings is related to the impact of MPOT effects on individual reflection. Within this set, it is possible to highlight larger and diverse

effects, mainly as observers have the opportunity to reflect on the practices they saw, so they may implement similar ones or avoid the mistakes observed in the less successful classes. In this regard, Bell & Mladenovic (2008) also note that some teachers reported a higher benefit from observing the classes of colleagues than from the feedback from their classes. There is potential in the suggestions arising from the observations that the observing lecturers learn both positive techniques to include in their own classes or see pedagogical errors they need to remove from their teaching. The lessons learned primarily include lecturer interactions with students, the lecturer's main role in the class, and the use of ICT in the classroom. This is one of the strongest benefits from the MPOT experience.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it could be said that MPOT has deeper effects on individual reflection than on a collective perspective. In addition, reflection seems to be more effective through the observation of others when compared with feedback received on one's own classes.

There was consensus that the reflection within the quartets was superficial and in general a deep criticism and discussion were not achieved. Such a conclusion may point to the need for more explicit training for in-classroom observation techniques.

The effective impact on simple practices that lecturers consider easy to include in their own classes and that they did not realize the importance of until the MPOT experience were recognized as the main result of the reflective activities. Practices including the position of the teacher inside the room, design of slides, the inflection and volume of one's voice, and ways to organize work groups were probably the result of superficial reflection. The indirect benefits of MPOT in professional development seem to be more relevant to the observers as they are primarily responsible for the changes they introduce in their own classes.

IMPLICATIONS

Suggestions could be to raise concerns regarding the process of MPOT to include a further reflection that could be established among each quartet of participants to foster and deepen reflection. The final meeting of participants could be used for this purpose. This could also be an important step to improve reflective practices and boost them to an institutional level.

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