

INTERNATIONALISING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Gabriela Pleschová, Comenius University in Bratislava

What students learn when studying in another country can have a dramatic effect on their personal and professional lives. It can markedly improve their communication and problem-solving skills and their ability to work in diverse teams and see issues from different perspectives. Even though all these competences are highly sought after in today's globalised world, students and teachers in Europe use the EU mobility schemes very unevenly. In 2016, the top four countries (France, Germany, Spain and Italy) sent more students abroad than the rest of Europe. Similarly, the top five receiving countries (Spain, Germany, UK, France and Italy) admitted more international students than all the other European countries together (European Commission 2017).

Specifically in Central Europe, a significant obstacle for universities' participation in EU mobility schemes is the limited number of foreign language programmes and courses on offer. For example, in 2017 even some of the largest universities in the region offered only a fraction of instruction in foreign languages: Masaryk University had 20 foreign language programmes, Comenius University 11, Jagiellonian University 12, and the University of Warsaw 24¹. Although there was an observable trend of increasing numbers of foreign language programmes, the speed of this increase has been rather slow and is likely to remain so without targeted interventions, especially those aimed at enhancing the skills and confidence of teaching staff members.

In order to contribute to this desired change, in 2018 a consortium of institutions including Comenius University in Bratislava, Masaryk University, Central European University, Delft University of Technology, and the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) applied for funding for an international collaborative project. The project, 'Improving Academic Teaching and Internationalisation through Enhanced Competences of University Teachers' (IMPACT), was to be implemented at two of the largest universities in Central Europe—Masaryk University and Comenius University—well-situated to pass on their experience to other institutions of the region. The project's overall goal was to enhance internationalisation, which we understand as 'the integration of international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight 2004). Approval of the proposal submitted to the Erasmus+ Strategic partnership scheme allowed the consortium implementing the IMPACT project in 2019-2022.

Contributions included in this book come from two sources. First, the IMPACT project partners announced and circulated a Europe-wide call for examples of good practice in internationalising student learning via the ECPR, one of the project partner institutions. Following the call, they se-

1 This information was obtained from the universities' websites in February 2017.

lected eight case studies from within various social science disciplines. These authors share their experiences of internationalisation in Western Europe, for example, at Lund University (Sweden), the University of Catania (Italy), the University of Coimbra (Portugal), and the University of Groningen (the Netherlands). Second, the book editors selected the best scholarship of learning and teaching (SOTL) papers from the teachers/participants of the two-year teaching development programme entitled 'Effective Teaching for Internationalisation', designed and implemented under the IMPACT project. The SOTL papers included in this book were substantially reworked for publication.

The variety of learning environments in which teachers strived to internationalise student learning demonstrates that internationalisation is relevant all across Europe and that individual teachers can articulate a range of well-thought responses about how to best cater to the needs of international students. This book embodies a diversity of experiences through the variety of the authors' disciplines, which include economics, ethnology, journalism, law, linguistics, medicine, museology, pedagogy, philosophy, political science, and sociology.

In order to serve as a source of inspiration for other teachers, each chapter starts with a description of a teaching challenge connected to internationalisation and the pedagogical method introduced to address the challenge. Then the authors present their courses, including information about the students and teacher(s). They outline their data collection and research methods and apply these to evaluate the outcomes of internationalised teaching on student learning. Each chapter concludes with a reflection on the replicability of the method or approach in other contexts and what can be done to enhance student learning further.

The teaching context

Before internationalising their classes, the teachers from Comenius University and Masaryk University, whose studies comprise a major part of this book, used a range of approaches to teaching international students. Sometimes, international students did not learn in one group together with home students, since some courses were offered in the local language and international students were assigned their own homework and consulted individually with the course teacher, as was, for example, the case for courses in psychology. Some international students studied with home students in one group but typically via listening to lectures, as was the case for courses in legal studies. Overall, lecturing was the predominant method of teaching/learning whereas active learning tasks were used only to a limited degree or not at all. Use of peer learning activities, where students learn by working in purposefully assigned groups that mix international and home students, was extremely rare.

As the chapters show, participants in the Effective Teaching for Internationalisation course made significant contributions to internationalisation at their universities, but they could not alter the context in which they taught. On one hand, in some fields—medicine (chapter by Repová), law

(Hron, Švedová), and economics (Čapek)—international and home students learn in two separate programmes and never meet because those in the English-language international programme pay a tuition fee whereas their peers who learn in the Slovak or Czech language study for free. Although internationalisation could theoretically capitalise on the diversity among international students via peer learning or other methods, it was not possible to bring students in the separate international and home degree programmes together. On the other hand, one teacher (Lešková), who was a doctoral student at the time, could not influence all aspects of student learning in her course because she only led the discussion seminar. Yet she made a valuable contribution that may serve as an inspiration for those working under similar limitations.

Another important contextual restriction was the COVID-19 pandemic, which unexpectedly changed the setting for all university teachers and students, including those in Bratislava and Brno. Even if teachers planned to teach their internationalised classes face-to-face, they had to rethink their class plans and start teaching online by venturing into using new tools of online education. Also, because of substantially reduced numbers of incoming exchange students, some teachers had no international students in their class, despite the programme facilitators' great efforts to recruit at least a few international students for each programme participant. These teachers then worked to implement in their courses the concept of internationalisation at home (*Beelen and Jones 2015*), for example by internationalising the course curriculum. Overall, teachers had to adapt to constant uncertainty as online and face-to-face class formats switched depending on the phase of the pandemic. As the contributions in this book document, the teachers made the best of the challenging situation and transformed the restrictions stemming from the pandemic into benefits for student learning.

Effective Teaching for Internationalisation

Effective Teaching for Internationalisation is a joint educational development programme for teachers from Comenius University in Bratislava and Masaryk University in Brno. The programme aims to help participant teachers learn to design, facilitate and evaluate (under)graduate courses in ways that attend to the needs of international students and mixed groups of home and international students, and to improve teachers' capacity to advance internationalisation at home.

The programme has been stretched over two years to allow academics with numerous commitments to complete the course activities and assignments. In Semester 1, the participants attend a series of seven half-day workshops on issues related to the design, facilitation, and evaluation of internationalised courses. During the workshops, participants are introduced to the concept of peer learning and invited to trial and explore various strategies to facilitate peer learning in their classes. In Semester 2, participants design a plan for internationalising one course they teach for undergraduate or graduate students; for participating PhD students the task is to internationalise at least three class sessions. In addition, all participants devise a class plan and

develop a research design to evaluate the outcomes of the new ways of teaching for student learning. In Semester 3, participants teach their courses according to the plan while collecting data on student learning. A peer observer attends at least one class session and discusses her/his observations with the teacher. Finally, in Semester 4, participants write a SOTL study or reflective paper, in which they report on the achievements and challenges stemming from internationalising their course.

While working on the course assignments, each participant is supported by a coach from among the session leaders. Coaches are professional educational developers working at the project partner institutions of IMPACT. The programme has been accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), which provided a Supporting Learning award, and course graduates receive a certificate from SEDA upon graduation. Comenius University in Bratislava accredited the course locally, allowing participants who are PhD students to receive ECTS credits. More details about the programme design can be found in Pleschová (2020).

In 2020-2022, the first cohort of programme participants included 33 faculty members and doctoral students, of which 22 graduated from the course. The programme built upon experiences from earlier courses: 'Learning-centred and Reflective Teaching: From Theory to Good Practice', offered in 2016-2018 for faculty members and doctoral students from Masaryk University and the University of Economics in Bratislava (Pleschová and Simon 2018, 2021), and 'Innovating Teaching and Student Learning', which was attended by teachers from various universities in Slovakia between 2011-2013 (Pleschová and McAlpine 2016).

Working to internationalise their classes, the teachers used different approaches and their accounts of their efforts to support the learning of international and mixed groups of students vary. Many teachers engaged students in peer learning, both inside and outside the classroom, as, for example, Blaho, Výškrabková, and Ananyeva. They found creative ways of using pair and group work to that end (Uhrin, Vargová, Stanková). Other teachers chose to change the method of student assessment by introducing or strengthening peer assessment, including Misic and Carvalho et al. All of the authors offer stories specific for their willingness to innovate despite the barriers in each context, courage to introduce methods and approaches entirely new for their department or institution, and attention to detail when (re)designing their courses.

The book chapters are divided into three thematic groups. The first group includes case studies about introducing peer learning, the second group looks at (peer) assessment, and the third presents other approaches to internationalisation, for example through simulations (Droste et al., Irrera), collaborative online international learning (Havelková), use of films (Kolarić, Santoianni), and an expert interview assignment (Nowak). The concluding chapter summarises the lessons learnt while internationalising teaching and student learning.

Using this book

We hope that case studies of internationalising student learning will provide inspiration for teachers who are considering making their classes more international but are unsure where to start or what can be done within the limitations of their institutional teaching environment. All of the chapters in this book showcase what individual teachers can do to internationalise student learning with relatively little difficulty, typically by introducing one or more well-designed learning activities and changing the method of assessment. Moreover, teachers can see how changes that support internationalisation can be evaluated through scholarship of teaching and learning and how reflection can further advance teaching and student learning.

The book may also be of use for educational developers who support teachers while internationalising degree programmes, courses, and course sessions. Similarly, it may serve as a source of information for university administrators who support their institution's mission to internationalise education.

In addition to being published in this book, each chapter can be downloaded for free from the open-access website impactportal.eu. Both the portal and this book include the contact information for each author in order to facilitate potential collaboration. We hope that the contributions in this volume encourage more teachers to welcome international students in their courses and to prepare home students for living and working in a globalised world. This way, teachers not only support their institution in admitting more international students but also prepare their home and international students for future mobility, jobs outside their home country, and working in international teams.

References

- Beelen, J. and Jones, E. (2015) 'Redefining internationalization at home', in A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, and P. Scott (eds.) *The European higher education area. Between critical reflections and future policies*, Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 59-72.
- 'Erasmus+ in numbers 2016' (2017) *European Commission*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en
- Knight, J. (2004) 'Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales', *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8:1, pp. 5-31.
- Pleschová, G. and McAlpine, L. (2016) 'Helping teachers to focus on learning and reflect on their teaching: What role does teaching context play', *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 48, pp. 1-9.
- Pleschová, G. and Simon, A. (2018) *Early career academics' reflections on learning to teach in Central Europe*, London: SEDA, available at: <https://www.seda.ac.uk/Early-career-academics-reflections-on-learning-to-teach-in-Central-Europe>
- Pleschová, G. (2020) 'Supporting academics who teach international students', *ETH Learning and Teaching Journal* 2:2, pp. 215-219.

Pleschová, G. and Simon, A. (2021) 'Doctoral students as early career university teachers. What hinders and what helps them to embrace the essentials of good teaching?', in A. Lee and R. Bongaardt (eds.) *The future of doctoral research. Challenges and opportunities*, London: Routledge, pp. 182-194.

Keywords

internationalisation at home, mobility



Gabriela Pleschová leads the Centre for Scholarship and Teaching in the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava where she also serves as an associate professor in the Department of Pedagogical Sciences and Andragogy. She is a graduate of Oxford University (2012, MSc. in Education) and the co-editor of the books *Teacher Development in Higher Education: Existing Programs, Program Impact, and Future Trends* (Routledge, 2013) and *Early Career Academics' Reflections on Learning to Teach in Central Europe* (SEDA, 2018). In 2019, she was awarded a Principal Fellowship from the AdvanceHE. gabriela.pleschova@uniba.sk