

INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY AS A COMPLETELY NEW EXPERIENCE

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The teaching-learning challenge

The long-standing practice in the Department of Psychology at Comenius University has been to offer individual lessons for international students when they enrol in courses. Rather than attending classes with the local Slovak students, these Erasmus students were asked to prepare a presentation or read some materials to be discussed later with the lecturer. For several years few international students applied for my courses, so I did the same: I met them for individual tutoring session and offered them some study materials. They were to prepare and deliver a presentation during the tutoring session, which the two of us then discussed. While this was a convenient solution, it defeated the purpose of the Erasmus+ mobility scheme.

In the winter 2017 semester I decided to try something new and invited an international student from Holland to deliver her English-language presentation to the local Slovak students enrolled in the same course in their mother tongue. It was a presentation about euthanasia and its specifics in her homeland, which was then compared with information about the specifics in our country, presented by a local student. The presentations were followed by a lively discussion and students reported great interest in being able to share different perspectives, which challenged their critical thinking and moral reasoning.

After this lesson, I realized that, just as the literature suggests (Jibeen and Khan 2015; Kahn and Agnew 2017), it was much more meaningful to have local and international students learn together. Having no guidelines to follow due to lack of such practice in my department, the challenge was not only to have international students attend the course together with their Slovak peers, but also to internationalise my Moral Psychology course in such a way that both local and international students can benefit from sharing their own experiences, opinions and emotions or explore similar experiences in various cultural and social contexts.

For this purpose, I have changed how I run my classes and now rely heavily on peer learning, while I also adapted the learning outcomes to align with the new course format. In order to see how this newly designed course assists students in learning, in this chapter I investigate if the students of the internationalised course on moral psychology attained the course learning outcomes.

Pedagogical methods

The aim of my new teaching and learning design was to internationalise the course and make international perspectives central to the course including in the syllabus, my teaching style and classroom activities. To address these challenges, I relied on peer learning, where students learn from and with each other (Boud et al. 2013). It is an effective learning tool via sharing diverse

knowledge, opinions and experiences, explaining ideas to others and developing skills in organising and planning learning activities, giving and receiving feedback, or by evaluating their own learning. There are many benefits reported for peer leaders, such as the acquisition of higher-level personal and professional skills, including empathy, decision making or teamwork skills, as well as reduced anxiety, greater sense of belonging, enhancing friendships and participating in the class (Keenan 2014). Thus, peer learning can be instrumental in enhancing intercultural awareness and building a learning community, where both local and international students share their diverse opinions and experiences. This internationalised course based on peer learning was designed to assist students in achieving the four learning outcomes of the course, which also serve as my hypotheses. Thus, I expect that by the end of the course students will be able to (H1) recognise and discuss various, including intercultural, perspectives on ethically difficult situations (i.e., moral dilemmas); (H2) reflect on their own and their classmates' opinions and emotions to ethically difficult situations; (H3) work effectively in mixed teams or groups of local and international students; and (H4) apply the approaches of moral psychology in real-life situations across different intercultural contexts.

The course, the students, and the lecturer

Moral Psychology is an elective course with weekly, 90-minute classes during the semester. I am the only lecturer and the number of students is limited to 30. The course is open for second- and third-year bachelor students, preferably psychology majors. The course introduces students to the psychological aspects of human morality as an interdisciplinary construct and encourages them to consider and discuss moral reasoning, emotionality, motivation and behaviour from various intercultural perspectives.

During the winter 2021 semester, when the innovations described below were applied and evaluated, the course was attended by 22 students. Four of them were international: two from Spain, one from Italy, and one from Montenegro. While the local students all majored in psychology, the international students came from other social science disciplines. There were eleven class sessions during the semester: for the first six the class met in person while, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining five sessions were held online via MS Teams.

In the first session, the main goal was to have students experience what the course would be like. Therefore, after I provided the students with all the necessary information related to the course and the assessment criteria, I divided them into small groups. In the groups, they not only got to know each other but also discussed the first moral dilemma. In the next session, I gave a presentation that introduced moral dilemmas and their philosophical and neuroanatomical correlates, which served as a demonstration of how to structure their own presentations and meet the assessment criteria. The following eight sessions were devoted to team presentations by students. Each team had 75 minutes to introduce their topic and run an interactive exercise with

discussion. I closed each session by adding my thoughts on the topic as well as words of appreciation and suggestions for the presenting team. After the class, students filled out a post-session feedback form online. During the final session of the course, the students started working on a final reflective essay allowing them to inquire about anything that was not clear.

The team presentation was the central activity of the course. While I included team presentations in earlier iterations of the course, now it was internationalised and combined with peer learning. Each student was expected to contribute to the presentation of their team and moderate the subsequent discussion actively. There were eight teams of two or three students. As there were only four international students in the class, four teams mixed local and international students and four had only local students. The inclusion of intercultural perspectives and interactive activities became mandatory parts of team presentations. During the first session, each team chose its presentation topic from a list of issues I had compiled for them (e.g., morality and emotions, moral motivation). Each presentation was required to include at least one moral dilemma to be resolved and three international perspectives (e.g., local, European, Anglo-American, Latin American, Asian, African etc.). Team presentations also had to combine presenting knowledge and empirical data with interactive activities, in which at least one moral dilemma was introduced and discussed, e.g., via online voting, quizzes, international case studies, role play, buzz groups, pyramids, crossovers, or breakout rooms. Each team had to share a handout for its presentation online at least two days before the session so that their peers could become familiar with the topic, too.

Each presentation was followed by students filling out a post-session feedback and reflection form, which combined peer assessment with self-reflection. While I have used this kind of assessment before, inspired by the peer learning and assessment approach, I augmented the earlier form with open-ended and multiple-choice questions. This way the presenting team received both summative and formative feedback, building middle- to high-level partnership among peers (Ní Bheoláin et al. 2020).

At the end of the course, the students wrote a final reflective essay, considering what they learned about the course topics, group dynamics, international diversity, and themselves while responding to various moral dilemmas.

Students were assessed based on three elements: (1) preparing and presenting the topic in the mixed teams (40%), (2) active participation either by joining the discussions and learning activities during the sessions or by filling out the post-session feedback and reflection form (30%; three points for each session or properly filled out form), and (3) the final reflective essay (30%).

Collected sources of data and methods

To evaluate the outcomes of my teaching innovation, I used a mixed research design relying on

both qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, to triangulate my data, I relied on five data sources from students, a colleague, and myself.

First, I utilised data from the students' post-session feedback and reflection form. It consisted of three parts. Firstly, students evaluated the presentation according to eight criteria focused on peer learning (overall approach to the topic, theoretical background, methodology, main findings, application, intercultural perspectives, promotion of interactivity, facilitating the discussion) using a five-point Likert scale, '1' being the best and '5' being worst. Secondly, students could offer written feedback to the presenting team on the main strengths of the presentation, areas for improvement, or any other comments and encouragements. The form concluded with reflection on the session in the form of five yes/no questions, as well as an opportunity to provide comments, ask questions or offer suggestions regarding the topic. The form was filled out by sixteen students on average for each presentation (minimum 13, maximum 21).

Second, the students' final reflective essays served as a good source of information about what they learnt about course topics, which topic they found the most interesting and why, the others in the group, about the international diversity and about themselves. At the end of this structured essay, they could also add any comments they had about the course, its structure or topics. Third, a new anonymous student evaluation form was developed by Comenius University's Faculty of Arts, in which students could evaluate various aspects of the course, e.g., opportunities for discussion and other learning activities, encouraging atmosphere, clear communication, developing knowledge through problem solving, independent thinking or completing exercises and creativity, teamwork skills, providing learning materials etc. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, only three students filled out the form. Students in our institution tend not to fill out the student evaluation form (the return rate is usually 20% or less).

Fourth, my colleague from the department observed one of the online classes and not only filled out a classroom observation protocol that primarily focused on internationalisation and peer learning—the two issues central to the innovation presented here—but also met with me one-on-one to discuss his observations.

Finally, I kept a reflective journal throughout the semester. After each class, I wrote down all my personal observations, comments and ideas for the future and recorded what happened during the session in the terms of peer learning and internationalisation (e.g., activities presented by the students leading the class, amount of time devoted to peer learning, working in mixed groups, engaging non-presenting classmates, respecting other opinions etc.).

To analyse the quantitative data, I used descriptive statistics because of the small number of students (N=22) and the nature of my hypotheses. For analysing the qualitative data, I relied on content analysis.

Findings

The requirement to address at least three intercultural perspectives during team presentations tilted the balance toward meeting the expectation that students would recognise and discuss the intercultural aspects of moral issues (H1). The requirement was an important motivational factor and students appreciated it: on the anonymous student evaluation forms, two out of three students strongly agreed that the course had explored the issues in depth and in their post-session feedback forms students also evaluated fairly highly the intercultural aspects of the presentations, giving an average score for each class that varied from 3.77 to 4.8 (out of 5).

Yet, the first learning outcome was not fully achieved. As I noted in the reflective journal, each team included various perspectives in their handouts, but not all of them mentioned these during the presentation, usually because of a lack of time. Some students made the same observations in the post-session feedback and reflection forms. There were also differences in discussing these perspectives, depending on whether they were part of the activities offered by the presenting team (e.g., role play while presenting on morality and religion, where the audience was randomly divided into buzz groups according to the world religions and were supposed to answer from that religious perspective), or just mentioned in the presentation and not touched upon during the discussion. The students appreciated most when an international student built up the presentation as a case study from their country of origin and compared it with other countries, followed by an in-class discussion. Indeed, I found this model most inspirational for future iterations of the course.

To be able to reflect on their own as well as their peers' opinions and emotions when discussing moral dilemmas (H2), it was vital that students had enough opportunities and a supportive environment. Interactive activities during the session—i.e., discussions, the post-session feedback forms, and the final reflective essays—offered ample opportunities for expressing and responding to their own and others' opinions, and the students recognised this themselves. All three students who filled out the anonymous student evaluation form strongly agreed that there were enough opportunities for discussion and other learning activities: 'I appreciated the fact that each student had the opportunity to express their opinion and that this opinion will be respected by other students' and 'I appreciate the discussions during the lessons'. International students shared the same sentiment: 'I have learned that being an international student is not always something bad. When I was expressing my thoughts-feelings about a certain concept people were carefully listening to me'.

The previous remark also suggests an encouraging atmosphere. Most students said they felt respected and part of a learning community while discussing the issues: 'I really like the course dynamics', and 'So far I really like these lessons as I feel very welcomed, there is always nice atmosphere and everyone's opinions are respected'. International students felt the same way: 'To be honest, as a student from another country and on top of that a student from another faculty,

I expected some difficulties, but there were none', and 'Being a foreign student I was quite afraid of not being able to integrate well in the class, but luckily that has not been the case'. Some students also realised that open and constructive discussions sometimes required a conscious effort: 'I have faced the challenges of being open to other opinions, because even though I try, I am still not perfect at it', and 'This course helped me to be more aware of my judgemental side. Even though I consider myself a pretty open and "free-spirited" person, my mind can be a little stubborn sometimes'. More importantly, students also recognised when someone broke this unspoken rule and complained about it.

As for actual student engagement, my reflective journal shows that approximately 60-80% of students joined the online interactive activities during the sessions and 15-45% joined the discussion during the face-to-face sessions. Students cited various reasons for not participating: lack of time or courage to express their own opinions due to the seriousness of the topic, having no opinion on a topic, or language difficulties.

Students were most likely to reflect on emotions regarding the course itself: on the post-session feedback forms, 99% of the time they said that they enjoyed the class activities and 92% of the students felt engaged in the sessions. As for the course content, while during the classes the students mostly shared the opinions supported by the research findings, in their feedback forms they also described more of their own feelings about the topics, for example: 'I really liked the topic. It was really up-to date, modern, relevant', or 'The topic was challenging and it was a hard question...'

While the team and group work were unproblematic for all of the groups, testing hypothesis three (H3) about working in mixed teams of local and international students is limited by the experience of only the four teams that included international students and those random groups created during interactive in-class exercises that included international students. Neither I nor the observer noticed any complications with students working in the mixed teams for presentation. Approximately 63% of the students noted in their post-session feedback that they collaborated with the students of other nationality.

The effect of mixed teams and groups was seen differently among the students. On one hand, some students did not recognise any substantial impact, for example: 'I do not think that the international students in this course differed so significantly from us locals. Maybe it is because we all come from Europe and are shaped mostly by the Western culture'. On the other hand, both the local and international students mentioned several positive experiences of interaction in the post-session feedback forms and the final essays. The local students reflected on the manner of communication: 'I admire how they are not afraid to talk publicly. I loved when some of them decided to actually talk during discussion. This is really unusual for Slovaks and I would love it if we'd developed into a more talkative nation', and opinions affected by culture: 'I loved to see how the opinions of our foreign colleagues differed under the influence of their culture'. The interna-

tional students described the willingness of the locals to help: ‘My co-workers knew how to use the app and were always willing to show me how to use it’, or differences in working process: ‘The fact that I was forced to work with Slovak students has helped me to learn new ways of working that are not so common in Spain, but that from today I will start to incorporate into my work’.

The strongest effect of mixing local and international students occurred outside of class time. After the sessions I often saw the international students talking with the locals, and students found this experience just as important as classroom interaction: ‘...after class [...] we all waited outside for each other to talk a little bit more about the discussed topic. We had the chance to discuss it on a deeper level with our exchange students, as well as with each other, and to expand our thoughts a little bit further’. Another student emphasised the opportunity to get to know each other better and learn about different cultures: ‘I remember that one time [name of student] and I stayed and talked for a little bit longer about everything that was going on in his head, about all the topics we had in class. It was quite interesting to hear his point of view since he studies law in Italy but is not Italian! He had a lot of new insight into everything, and I think it was valuable for me since I could learn a lot from that conversation alone’.

Similarly to the inclusion of three intercultural perspectives, applying the concepts of moral psychology in real-life situations in different intercultural contexts (H4) was mandatory for the team presentations. This was achieved at least by including a moral dilemma related to the topic that the audience could vote on. My research findings showed that applying the concepts in discussion worked out much better than the inclusion of international perspectives, however. It is clear from my reflective journal that these were the favourite parts of the presentations, with high potential for interaction in the group. Voting was conducted anonymously via online interactive tools (e.g., Slido, Kahoot, or Mentimeter), which supported confidentiality within the group and accelerated group dynamics. Voting was usually followed by plenary or small group discussion. Similarly, the student evaluation forms showed that all three students strongly agreed with the statement that the course developed their knowledge through problem solving, independent thinking or completing exercises.

The most notable application of moral dilemmas occurred when students considered their relevance to and consequences for their lives. One noted how it made them reconsider the manner of their decision making: ‘I saw myself in situations when I really couldn’t decide a few times, because the more “ethical” side of me felt like it was in contrast with my faith side and belief system’. Another mentioned the consistency (or lack thereof) of decisions: ‘one thing I have faced is the aspect of consistency. As humans we try to be consistent with our previous ways of thinking, but I found this to be a burden. [...] Now I have come to conclusion that it is okay to change my mind when I realise later on that I have a different view’. Others focused on their emotions: ‘I have explored a wide range of emotions that I can feel during moral dilemma solving. This definitely contributed to shaping my self-image and understanding myself more deeply’. And reflections on

behaviour: 'I suddenly wondered about different outcomes of my actions [...] Before this course, I had never studied moral dilemmas or how to resolve them. I simply believed I would always know what to do'. Thus, they went far beyond simply learning about the discussed topics by learning about themselves.

Replicability in a different context

Internationalisation brings brand new perspectives to a topic. I find it to be a great asset in any course where local and international students come together to cooperate and share their experiences. It can also be applied in classes consisting only of local students by using literature from different intercultural backgrounds and discussing their specifics.

Peer learning adapted in the form of team presentations enhances the motivation of all the students in the class to join in the learning process, and requires academic skills to handle a topic, using research databases, and facilitating a peer discussion. Therefore, it is more relevant for advanced bachelor's or master's degree students. I believe that three to five students per team is the ideal number as larger groups likely decrease involvement in active learning tasks. I find it important to support students during the whole process of preparing and presenting a topic in a team, where a model presentation by a lecturer can be very useful in that it introduces students to the format, thereby reducing their anxiety of presenting.

Peer assessment after each session using the format of the post-session feedback form is a great asset for the lecturer to monitor the classroom atmosphere continuously and consider different perspectives in the final assessment. However, peer assessment is more suitable for those students who have prior experiences with academic assessment. In larger groups of more than twenty students I find the use of multiple-choice questions more effective because while open-ended questions are more suitable for formative feedback, they demand more time from the lecturer to read and process them.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that addressing the main teaching challenge of internationalising the course by inviting foreign students to regular lessons with the local students was successful. Including peer learning and redesigning assessment to match the new course structure greatly contributed to the attainment of the learning outcomes. Even if not all learning outcomes were achieved fully or to the same extent, the students showed notable progress in all four areas. The least progress was achieved in discussing various intercultural perspectives and it is important to explore how this aspect could be further strengthened in the future, for example giving it stronger emphasis in the instructions and during the class sessions, so that each member of the team would represent one of such perspectives. Nonetheless, the greatest achievement of the innovation went beyond the expected learning outcomes by creating a real learning community, where some of the local

and international students met after class and continued the discussion (Boud et al. 2013).

During the course, I also realised some limitations which I find important to consider and address in the future. Firstly, some of the local students were frustrated that the course was held in English and decided to drop the course. Unfortunately, the course description in the online information system failed to contain information that the language of the course was changed to English. I will remedy this from the next semester. Secondly, some students and I had occasional difficulties expressing our opinions due to imperfect language skills. In addition to working on improving the skills, it is very helpful to use online tools such as Slido during the sessions because they allow more time for formulating one's sentences and use of an online translator.

I also find statements posted in the post-session feedback to be both inspiring and instructive and would like to think about a way to share some of them with the class, while respecting confidentiality. Thirdly, the fact that all the international students were from different fields of study made it possible to build on prior and varying knowledge. However, compared to previous years, we did not explore the issues in the same depth. I would like to think about utilising the online learning platform more for sharing research papers and other materials which were not mentioned during the sessions both by the lecturer and the students, and also support the students to discuss them via chat.

When I reflect on the feedback from both the local and international students, I am convinced that the benefits that the changes based on peer learning and internationalisation brought greatly outweigh the costs. My experience was aptly summarised in a comment by one of the local students: 'Having international diversity in class was a completely new experience, and I think it was amazing!'

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Summary

This chapter discusses internationalisation of the elective bachelor-level course Moral Psychology based on peer learning. The main teaching challenge was to make international perspectives central in the course, including the syllabus, methods of teaching style, and classroom activities. Therefore, I introduced peer learning and mixed local and international students in teams. Teams prepared a class-long presentations incorporating intercultural perspectives and interactive activities. They provided peer assessment that included both summative and formative feedback. Relying on student feedback and reflection, a colleague's observation of one of the classes, and my own reflective journal, this chapter shows how the new approach to teaching Moral Psychology helped students recognise and deliberate moral dilemmas while working both in teams and groups. The evidence suggests the students appreciated these changes: they said they felt welcomed, engaged, respected and challenged. More importantly, they created a real learning community, where local and international students met even after class.

Keywords

class atmosphere, (peer) assessment, student-led seminar

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