

INTRODUCING EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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Over the past decades, universities in most parts of the world became global and this is also true for Central Europe. Increasing numbers of foreign students study in the region, either as part of exchange programmes or for entire degrees. The teaching staff members are also becoming more international and it is now very rare to find an academic who has not spent at least a semester abroad. This has spurred a great deal of discussion on how teaching is done here and elsewhere. A few university instructors and some newly established colleges use learning and assessment methods that are different from traditional approaches characterised by frontal lecturing and end-of-the-semester oral exams or seminar papers. Yet, these efforts have not translated into a comprehensive transformation of local teaching practices.

This book presents case studies by participants, doctoral students mostly, in a new educational development programme that introduced them to student-centred approaches¹ and innovative teaching methods. Using their newly acquired pedagogical knowledge, participants redesigned their course sessions to stimulate good learning. The chapters are mostly accounts of how participants addressed problematic issues encountered in their previous teaching. Each chapter starts with a description of a teaching challenge and one or two pedagogical concepts that were used to address the challenge. Then the authors outline their data collection and research methods and apply these to evaluate the impact of the new ways of teaching on student learning. Chapters conclude with a reflection on whether the teaching change met the expected outcomes and what can be done to enhance student learning further.

Teaching context

The contributors come from two universities: Masaryk University in Brno and the University of Economics in Bratislava. Masaryk University is the second largest university in the Czech Republic with over 40,000 students who enrol in a wide range of programmes. It was placed by the 2018 Times Higher Education ranking among the top seven universities in the new EU member states. With about 7,500 students, the University of Economics in Bratislava offers degrees mostly in economic disciplines and is one of the largest universities in Slovakia. To limit the diversity in the participants' disciplinary backgrounds, at Masaryk University we recruited only from departments offering degrees in the social sciences and humanities. While most of the authors teach at

¹ We understand student-centeredness as meaning that the teacher's focus is on how his or her students learn, rather than on the teacher's own performance. Students' choice in their education is facilitated; the student is encouraged to do more than the lecturer, and/or a shift in the power relationship between the student and the teacher can be observed. The teacher pays attention to who his/her students are and how they learn, so that good learning can occur.

these two universities, a few of them were teaching elsewhere (for example, in Kosovo or Iran). The teaching context largely determined the participants' level of autonomy and authority over their courses: most of them could not influence the curriculum design, choose the classes they would teach, or decide on their own assessment methods. This left participants responsible almost solely for learning activities in their seminars. Institutional rules on what a doctoral student can and cannot do, especially when working as a teaching assistant for an experienced professor, thus significantly restricted participants' ability to teach in line with what they learnt in the development programme. Aside from these rules, two more factors influenced participants' teaching: 1) typical departmental pedagogic practices and 2) the level of tolerance of the department chair towards novel ways of teaching. These factors made participants constantly balancing what their programme coaches recommended with what their supervisors, course leaders or departmental chairs wanted. Bringing change to a course hence implied not only introducing new teaching methods but, more importantly, finding ways to navigate the system and change old habits². Engagement in our programme was quite an exceptional experience for these early-career teachers because educational development is only an emerging area of practice in Central Europe. Academics usually get very little recognition for teaching as they are promoted based on their publication record. And even if almost all doctoral students are assigned as teaching assistants, they get most credit for their dissertation and related research work. Conferences where teachers can present and discuss their teaching experiences are non-existent. Furthermore, there is no national teaching framework like the one in the United Kingdom (UK)³ and there are no institutional resources (or at best very few) to support teaching such as, for example, a fund for innovative or collaborative teaching projects. In this sense, the situation in this geographic region resembles that in the UK – or a similar English-speaking country – fifty years ago.

The programme

The programme *Student-centred and reflective teaching: From theory to good practice* was designed as part of a collaborative international project with the purpose of enhancing participants' teaching capabilities. More specifically, the programme aimed to help doctoral students

1. become more student-centred in various aspects of their teaching: from class design through class conduct to assessment and class evaluation. We saw this as particularly relevant as we introduced a teaching development programme at institutions where teacher-centred practices have a long tradition and remain prevalent in many disciplines;

2 While we would have preferred participants to teach an entire course or a significant number of course sessions, sometimes they were limited to innovating and teaching a few sessions. However, in several cases course participants were responsible for teaching their own courses, and had relative freedom to shape the ways of student learning in all course sessions.

3 See the UK Professional Standards Framework (2018).

2. learn a set of fundamental concepts, principles and approaches related to higher education teaching and learning. We considered such a knowledge base essential for participants to design alternative and more effective ways of learning than those traditionally used at their institutions;
3. become more reflective about teaching and student learning. Because there is enough evidence from elsewhere that teachers' reflection can improve student learning (McAlpine and Weston 2000; Kreber 2004), we wanted participants to reflect on teaching and learning more often than is likely the current practice at their institutions.

The programme built upon an experience from a similar course that we offered in 2011-2013 for 82 teachers from various universities in Slovakia and where we could evidence improvement in all three outcomes for the pilot cohort of participants (Pleschová and McAlpine 2016). This time, however, we designed the programme specifically for doctoral students from two institutions: the University of Economics in Bratislava and Masaryk University in Brno. The programme comprised a summer school and a follow-up online component. The first cohort of participants admitted in the 2017/2018 academic year included 18 individuals: two of whom had recently defended their doctoral dissertations and the rest in various stages of their doctoral study.

The programme started with an eight-day summer school, which consisted of 21 face-to-face workshop sessions and provided a foundational conceptual orientation for teaching at the university level. All sessions engaged participants in a range of activities that required them to apply theory to the courses they teach. Participants also received feedback from the session leaders on how they completed assigned tasks.

During the online phase, which took nine months, the participants were expected to integrate knowledge and skills developed during the summer school with their teaching practice. Each participant was asked to prepare a teaching innovation, implement and evaluate it at least three times, i.e., in three different course sessions. Given the constraints on participants' freedom, these innovations were mostly in relation to in-class instructional strategies. We called these projects teaching innovations because of the novelty they brought into the teaching approach and practice of the departments. Finally, the participants wrote a reflection paper, in which they considered the impact of their new ways of teaching on student learning; these accounts make up this book.

For the innovation to follow sound pedagogic principles and at the same time be feasible in terms of the teaching context, each programme participant worked with a coach who was a professional educational developer. The role of the coach was to offer feedback on the programme assignments that included the design and evaluation of the innovation, the reflection report, and a statement of the participant's teaching philosophy. For more details on the programme design,

please see <http://euba.sk/qualityteaching>. The coach also served as a critical friend whenever a participant faced a difficulty in the teaching process and sought informed advice.

The programme was accredited both locally, by the University of Economics in Bratislava, and internationally, by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), UK. All graduates received 10 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits and an internationally recognized certificate from SEDA, namely the Supporting Learning Award, as evidence of their professional development and achievement. Initially, we estimated that each participant would spend 135 hours studying for the online segment, but many participants engaged with the programme far beyond this, as they shared with us after completing it.

Book chapters

In this book, we present a collection of reflection papers written by programme graduates that were selected for the content of their innovation, research design, and quality of academic writing. These papers were substantially reworked for the book, which sometimes included five different revisions, to improve data analysis, level of reflection and presentation style.

Striving to improve their students' learning, the innovating teachers came up with creatively different approaches and their stories are therefore varied. For example, Minin writes about introducing podcast feedback to student essays instead of merely giving a mark and a few lines of textual comments. Another author, Kováčová, had a unique opportunity to teach psychology in Teheran and compares student reactions to the same active learning exercises which she did with her students from Brno. Voca shows how he changed a lecture-based course for over a hundred students by engaging them in pair work. Kašpárková discusses redesigning a personnel psychology course, which students initially perceived as unimportant, despite the high demand for personnel psychologists on the job market. Kovačević offers inspiration for helping students to master presentation skills and group work rather than expecting them to reproduce learnt material on the exam. Other authors offer similarly interesting stories, distinguished for their personal commitment and passion to engage students in meaningful learning, despite the constraints from their teaching environment.

Because many authors faced similar teaching difficulties, for example a lack of student participation or students struggling to embrace disciplinary concepts or develop academic skills, the book chapters naturally formed five thematic clusters, an overview of which can be found in table 1. A commentary by an external expert (educationalist) introduces each cluster in order to highlight its theoretical and practical implications.

Table 1. Grouping of book chapters by teaching challenges experienced by authors

Cluster	Teaching challenge	Learning method introduced	Authors	External commentator
1.	lack of student participation	group work, cut-ups and topic maps	Godwin K. Awuah, Michał Tkaczyk	Lynn McAlpine
2.	low quality of student learning in a research methods course	combination of mini lectures and active learning tasks	Kateřina Fridrichová, Ivana Rapošová	Katarina Mårtensson
3.	low level of student understanding of concepts, lack of student participation and engagement	pair work, group work	Stanislava Kováčová, Ina Schmidt	Peter van Petegem
4.	students' underdeveloped teamwork skills, presentation skills and academic writing skills	group work, audio feedback with two-stage feedback	Dubravka Kovačević, Nikita Minin	Torgny Roxa
5.	low level of student motivation, lack of student concentration and engagement	continuous assessment, pair work, active learning tasks to develop higher order thinking	Ludmila Kašpárková, Shpend Voca, Barbora Padrtová	Kathleen M. Quinlan

Using this book

As the editors, we compiled this book to encourage discussion on what individual teachers can accomplish at the class level to enhance student learning at institutions and in countries new to educational development. Our aim is for readers not only to enjoy reading the book chapters, but also to respond to them since the authors welcome suggestions for a) alternative ways of dealing with their teaching problems, b) recommended literature, and c) contacts for colleagues using similar methods or facing such challenges. Alternately, you might want to encourage the authors to do more in the future, or show appreciation for what they have achieved. This can all

be done easily through SEDA's blog: <https://thesedablog.wordpress.com> or the Active Learning in Political Science blog (ALPS): <http://activelearningps.com>. You can also contact authors via their email addresses.

We hope that teachers reading this book will find it an inspiration for making their courses more student-centred and conducive of effective learning, even if the teaching environment does not make much scope for change. Moreover, teachers will see how teaching innovations can be evaluated using action research and how reflection can advance teaching further.

We also hope that for educational developers the book will become a useful source to learn about how the teaching context can constrain the ability of programme participants to change student learning. In addition, the reader will find a range of methods and approaches used by the innovating teachers to overcome institutional barriers and to design teaching that is student-centred, uses novel ways of learning and assessment and significantly improves student learning.

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