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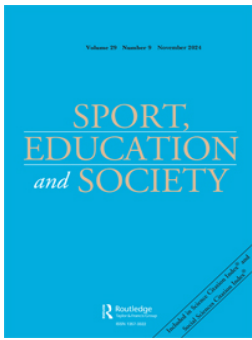
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# Possibilities for an internationalised, inclusive pedagogy for transnational sport education: the case of a safe sport education programme in Lithuania

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## ABSTRACT

Global education is a priority in the Higher Education (HE) system of all nations. In sport degree programmes in HE, the internationalisation trend is also noticeable. However, working in transnational education settings may bring to light, and generate existential and pedagogical contemplation of some of the foundational principles and assumptions about effective teaching. This paper aims to extend theoretical understanding of the confluence of internationalisation and educational modalities to fostering critical thinking. And, illustrate how building language-sensitivities in variable delivery may yield effects upon positive classroom experiences and establishing a 'safe' space for communication and learner-informed/learner-led dialogue. Based on a case study of a safe sport education programme for university student-athletes in Lithuania, this paper features a narrative that amalgamates: (1) descriptions of the practical context, session structure and delivery; (2) reflections on the sessions from the lead author; and, (3) focus group data from student participants. The case presented reveals that irrespective of an educator's efforts to acculturate to the distinct context, continued uncertainties regarding the teaching environment, language and cultural differences, and learners' understandings of subject content remained perennial concerns. Such issues necessitated adopting careful session design that incorporated a breadth of methods to make students' experiences more meaningful and inclusive. Key here was the consideration of language and conceptual assumptions (e.g. vis-a-vis 'safe' sport), and wider Western-hegemonic frameworks of what sport is/is not. The analysis illustrates how efforts to consider language, use student-co-creation and blended learning can be effective in generating a comfortable space for interaction, communication and learning. Thus, this paper contributes to continuing debates on transnational education, internationalisation in HE and roles sport content may play in generating global dialogue on critical contemporary issues.

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Cross-national scholarly exchange has been part of academic culture since the founding of the first universities during the mediaeval period (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016). In today's Higher Education (HE)

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context, global education is a priority in the education system of all nations (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Such an emphasis has garnered gravitas amid the intertwined forces of capitalism, which has necessitated rampant marketisation of HE towards attracting lucrative international demographics, and geopolitical posturing in which universities' strength, vitality and diversity comprises a symbol and reflection of national intellectual capital and power (Giroux, 2016). Universities frequently utilise transnational provision to generate revenue, internationalise curricula, expand international enrolments and address size constraints imposed on 'home' campuses (Jenkins, 2013; Ziguras & Hoare, 2009).

With regard to sport degree programmes in HE, the internationalisation trend is also noticeable. Recent studies have drawn attention to the value, opportunities and issues for internationalised education within the field (Chen, 2022; Davies & Ströbel, 2022; Springer et al., 2020). In addition, the sport sector is increasingly seen as a dynamic area of graduate employability. The universal qualities, popularity and physical nature of sport afford a means for establishing a 'common' ground within an internationalised classroom, and provide a vocabulary of concepts and ideas on which to orientate language learning and establish a (potentially) familiar and comfortable territory to engage global student audiences. As scholars have acknowledged, the appeal of sport among students may be utilised to generate positive and collaborative classroom cultures for learning (Springer et al., 2020). Research has, to note, recognised that sport content provides a useful point, and catalyst, for learners to engage with critical global issues (e.g. inequality, power and privilege, resource distribution, global North/South dynamics etc.). In doing so, the intention is to problematise sport axioms and illustrate the sector's connectivities and disjunctures from other areas of life. Although this work is insightful, there remains scope for greater attention on the underlying pedagogical structures and decision-making processes, and *in situ* realities and practices, that make these spaces meaningful and effective for learners and educators. Thus, there is a need to consider the pedagogical approaches that are employed towards these ends within international settings/curricula. In particular, what may work or not within specific settings with particular cohorts and, moreover, to carefully evaluate which pedagogies may be more effective in producing spaces that enable students to meaningfully engage with potentially new or challenging content.

In synergy with the work presented above, this paper focuses on safe sport<sup>1</sup> as one contemporary issue of a critically and ethically orientated sport studies/management education. Safe sport, particularly with its discussion and treatment of ethical and cultural sensitivities, values, and practices is also an area where a considered pedagogical approach is warranted (Kavanagh et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2022). In this paper, we present an example of safe sport education in an international HE context. In doing so, the paper aims to:

- (1) extend theoretical understanding of the confluence of internationalisation and educational modalities to fostering critical thinking; and,
- (2) illustrate how building language-sensitivities in variable delivery may yield effects upon positive classroom experiences and establish a comfortable space for communication and student-informed/student-led dialogue.

The value of this work lies in better understanding and contextualising curricula design and delivery in ways that might translate more effectively within the internationalised classroom and resonate with students. Beyond this, the paper has merit in providing critical reflections for others with regards to some of the benefits of more strategically adopted methodological approaches. Towards these ends, the paper is organised as follows: First, we discuss the internationalisation of HE which raises interesting areas of consideration for sport programmes engaging with transnational education (e.g. forces that incentivise HE internationalisation and cross-cultural learning). Second, we highlight how internationalised education provides means to enhance cultural exchange, global citizenship and learning. Building on Norman et al. (2024), we are aware of a pervasive Western approach to knowing and doing in sport degree programmes in HE and we want to

disrupt this in our practice. Accordingly, we wanted to examine our pedagogical practices as a means to understand some of the issues around Western-centric hegemonies, and how these manifest in and through curricular design and delivery, and related social interactions between educator and learner. We are guided by Norman et al.'s (2024) interest and sensitivity towards the connection between doing (e.g. particular classroom practices as an educator) and learning (that may formally or informally transpire as a result). Third, we present a narrative of a safe sport programme that was delivered in Lithuania to illustrate approaches, challenges and opportunities for pedagogical development. We then conclude with encouragement for wider consideration and conceptualisation of international pedagogy and practices within HE sport studies programmes.

### ***Internationalisation and the political economy of HE in Europe***

The Bologna Agreement of 2009 was developed to promote cooperation among European institutions and increase the mobility of students and lecturers (European Commission, 2023). Further, in 2021–2027 the European Commission has ring-fenced €26.2 billion to fund the Erasmus+ programme which supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe, of which the mobility and cooperation opportunities in HE are prioritised (European Commission, 2023b). Consequently, there has been a steady growth of transnational HE systems (TES) or the delivery of education by a provider from one country to students in another (also referred to as cross-border education). In the case of this paper, the initial HEI connections were developed from this Erasmus(+) foundation. However, post the UK's departure from the European Union (Brexit) (which ceased funding for staff mobility), the relationship has been resourced and sustained by the lead author.<sup>2</sup> Further models have been built around cross-/shared university programmes/degrees, engagement and HE partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations and third-sector providers to develop transnational curricula on areas of global, regional, or mutual interest (e.g. sustainable development goals, environmental/climate issues, or strategic development priorities related to commerce, leadership, entrepreneurialism, etc.) (European Commission, 2022). Additional details on the specific political economy of Erasmus+ and internationalisation in Lithuania form part of the paper's case provided shortly.

### ***Towards interculturalism, global citizenship and cultural learning***

Notwithstanding the popularity and success of schemes such as Erasmus(+), and enduring Turing outcomes pending,<sup>3</sup> critique remains that the hegemony of Western/Global-North models of internationalised education have served to frame philosophies of knowledge and learning in particularly restrictive ways, and do not always open possibilities for indigenous ontologies, epistemologies and cultural logics to come to the fore (R'boul, 2022). Moreover, instruction and assessment may often be ethnocentric and make considerable assumptions as to the students' familiarity with many teaching and learning practices (Wu et al., 2015). Working in transnational education, we have been mindful of these concerns and our positionality as Western scholars who have undertaken work in a variety of global contexts (e.g. Australia, Brazil, Canada, USA, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan), while the specific focus of our transnational education, research and academic networks has been in Europe. Part of this acknowledgement has been developing attentiveness to our work and endeavours to create learning experiences that do not privilege or position English-language/Western-hegemonic frameworks as central or immutable. Rather, our shared beliefs and intentions have been to draw upon students' own experiences, language and understanding to challenge constructs and consider the social and cultural relevance of established approaches, within their current lives, situations and/or future work in/beyond sport.

As previous critiques have noted, there exist tendencies in internationalisation (particularly within early approaches) to be grounded in the view of cultural binaries (i.e. Western versus non-Western), and entrenched 'othering' of recipient nations, learners and ideas (Hofstede, 1991). Consequently,

transnational teaching, unintentionally, may still promote cultural hegemony, whereby Western ways of learning and teaching are prioritised (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). This has been argued by Kim (2019) as not valid in a globalised world. Acknowledging this promotion, there have been noted shifts from ethnocentrism to interculturalism that have recognised the nuances of the historical, political and cultural contexts in which they are located (Ryan, 2011). Aligning with increasing numbers of globally mobile international students in tertiary education, one response has been to advocate for transcultural pedagogies (Cadman & Song, 2012; Ryan, 2011). Such approaches work from the perspective that culture is multiple, fluid, and subject to changes when interacting with other cultures (Cuccioletta, 2002). It also suggests that one culture should not be treated as more dominant and powerful (Santos, 2007), and the focus should be on the formation of new cultures and realities (Onghena, 2008). In relation to the discussions of safe sport in this paper, this has entailed students questioning extant international and national structures, systems and concepts that are predominant vis-a-vis safeguarding, welfare, abuse, ethics, coaching methods, and coach-athlete relations.

Europe provides a vibrant landscape of educational collaboration and activity, and moreover, the region's socio-cultural, geopolitical, and historical diversities have established a distinct context in which to foster and improve transnational HE. Foremost, there are 24 official languages in Europe (European Union, 2023), with English regarded as a lingua franca (ELF) by an increasing number of people in non-English speaking countries (Sasajima, 2016). Language difficulties can be present when the teaching language differs from the first language of either the lecturer or the student (Ramburuth & Tani, 2009), and working across languages can be fatiguing, which adds further challenges to their delivery or understanding of the topic (De Vita, 2000). The concept of translanguaging has emerged to provide a vocabulary for multilingual perspectives in teaching and learning in the languages (Fang et al., 2022), but we argue, could be extended into teaching and learning in other disciplines and fields. The concept recognises the multiple linguistic resources and embodied modes of communication that a speaker can employ to make meaning (Li, 2018), promoting fluidity between languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Put simply, it involves the use of elements of two or more languages together to communicate more effectively. This could involve students communicating with each other in their preferred language(s), accessing online materials in this language, and reporting to the group in the primary classroom language. In the classroom, the appeal of translanguaging lies in aiding content learning, supporting students who might not be proficient in English-only lessons, reinforcing classroom management and creating class rapport (Fang & Liu, 2020).

Sport and physical education, as a professional field, constitute a distinct educational space to explore pedagogies. The significance of which has been acknowledged, in one way, by sport-(for)-development and sport management scholars who have, variously, illustrated the effectiveness of sport as a site to expand cultural learning, international knowledge exchange and broader social consciousness (Oxford & Spaaij, 2020; Schulenkorf, 2017; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018; Whitley et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2016). Whereas educational aims and pedagogical processes within this area may differ, there is a synergy in the underlying assumption vis-a-vis the universality of sport (and its metaphors, vernacular and idioms), and that it has educational value (e.g. that learning can occur through sport – be it in and outside the classroom). Similarly, unity between sport and global/cultural learning has been transposed to professional coach training and development; in particular, the growth of international conferences and workshops, network events, formal teaching sessions etc. All of which have been adapted in light of the Covid-19 pandemic to increase accessibility, widen participation and diversity and democratise education (we acknowledge that claims about the genuine inclusivity of such structures can be duly questioned as many participants may still face economic, political, geographical and cultural inequalities) (Baker et al., 2022; Cahapay, 2021).

Scholars in sport (for development) and physical education research, especially within Europe, have identified the necessity of inclusive policy, pedagogy and pedagogy-for-transformative

education (Dinold et al., 2013; Timuş et al., 2023). While contextual focus varies, there is harmony in the recognition given to engaging with *meaningful* creativity and innovation in course design and classroom practice to both teach content in ways that better connect to pertinent sociocultural, geopolitical, economic, and philosophical issues (e.g. social justice, sustainability, health inequalities, cultural sensitivity and ethics) (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020; Timuş et al., 2023). The intentions in so doing are to afford learners opportunities to connect to issues in their own ways (e.g. utilising familiar language, concepts and ideas) that resonate with their specific context and contemporaneous engagement with the world.

There has, variously, been a focus on how inclusive practices can be fostered in teaching sport and physical education to young people within the continent (Dinold et al., 2013; Marron et al., 2021). Such work predominantly emphasises the learner and learners' needs, though affords little attention to educators and their wider work settings. Furthering these approaches, additional work has sought to explore the differences within inclusive pedagogies (that are often content and method focused) and universal designs for learning (which adopt broader frameworks that are more holistic and encompass policy, practices and physical space) (Timuş et al., 2023). Notwithstanding offering new ways to approach inclusive practice, recent interest has primarily examined the concepts, experiences, and intersectionalities of disability, gender, ethnicity/race, and religion within sport and physical education settings (this includes, also, coach education programmes).

When transcultural and translanguaging perspectives are applied to higher education and specifically, sport education, education providers are required to foster mutual respect and exchange amongst different knowledge traditions and academic cultures (Ryan, 2011). This entails re-positioning students and educators as partners in the generation of new knowledge and academic practices. Such an approach complements existing discussions in sport education relating to critical pedagogy, decolonisation, critical race theory, etc. (Fovet, 2023). Guided by aspects of this scholarship, as a working notion, we conceptualise internationalised and inclusive pedagogy as *teaching processes and practices within sports education (broadly conceived) carefully attenuated in thought, design, and execution to nuances and sensitivities of local contexts and cohorts, that utilise (socially/culturally/politically/ethically) critically framed content to connect with learners in meaningful ways.*

While the content and approach of teaching have been critiqued, and there are examples of good work occurring in HE sport education with regards to internationalisation and inclusivity, acknowledgement is needed of the wider context and *in situ* realities of transnational teaching (particularly in the European/Erasmus+ setting). For example, it warrants consideration of how any teaching (and related activity) is positioned within the everyday rhythms of academic careers and workloads. Scholars have, specifically, highlighted the lack of commitment to preparing teachers to teach transnationally (Hai Ngan Tran et al., 2023). Issues vary across contexts, but include familiarising one's individual cultural and learning expectations and assumptions to the contextual realities (Dunn & Wallace, 2006); spatial and temporal logistics of operating across time zones, and different teaching and student working rhythms (e.g. staff with 'less teaching heavy' semesters/workloads and taking on additional responsibilities during lighter periods at home institutions); and assessment and quality assurance issues (Bordogna, 2020). Hence, the focus of this paper is on utilising the lens of the educator to explore and understand the intersections of transnational education and learning, culturally sensitive pedagogies, and critical sport dialogues in Lithuania as a context for fostering critical thinking.

## Methods

### Context

Broadly speaking, the histories of the Baltic nation of Lithuania have been contoured by the socialist and democratic evolutions and developments of its political and economic systems, and unique geopolitical position on the periphery and semi-periphery of Western and Eastern European dynamics



(Blagojević-Hjusun, 2014). Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the nation gained independence in 1990, and entrance into the European Union (2004) and Eurozone (2015). The country's contemporary transition to European Union membership, regional collaborative perspectives, and wider globalisation processes have also translated into a re-emphasis of an international outlook within the nation's HE provision. A marker in this regard has been the valuing and investment in educational mobility via the European Union-funded Erasmus+ programme. In 2021, Lithuania received €9,254,317.24 in mobility grants. The funds supported 2072 staff and 8010 incoming students to the country's education sector, and a further 3595 staff and 9698 outgoing students (European Commission, 2022). In 2022/2023, there were 9467 international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Lithuania and 2530 Lithuanian students studying abroad (1850 as part of Erasmus+, 376 self-funded, 304 as part of other exchange programmes) (Statistics Lithuania, 2024).

The prioritisation of such mobility is also evident within the extent to which internationalisation is embedded within wider sectors, and specifically universities' ethos, strategic principles, and marketing across the country. For example, the university, which was the setting for the case presented in this article, was established in 1922 (re-established in 1989), and was built on pursuing policies of liberal studies and establishing successful international relations with other universities around the world. Thus, internationalisation has, invariably, also opened channels and opportunities for a reciprocal transnational flow of ideas, teaching practices and content.

### **The case**

This paper is based on a wider project on safe sport delivered to a small group of student-athletes in Lithuania (see Purdy & Lang, 2023; Purdy & Lang, 2024). The education programme was developed out of a long-standing relationship between the first author and scholars of sport in Lithuanian HE institutions. This particular paper<sup>4</sup>, grounded and framed in the interpretivist paradigm, grew from observations during the project relating to the learning environment, educator-learner dynamic and delivery development across the week as opposed to focusing on the specific safe sport content. Consequently, the narrative presented later in this paper adopts a triadic approach amalgamating: (1) descriptions of the practical context, session structure and delivery; (2) reflections on the sessions from the lead author; and, (3) focus group data from student participants. Such an approach illustrates some of the connections and tensions within the setting. And, moreover, may enrich an understanding of the forces at play, and factors to consider, vis-a-vis language and cultural sensitivities, effective communication strategies, inclusivity, and safe space within internationalisation work.

In Lithuania, the dominant form of delivery of sport education is didactic with a privileging of the biosciences and neglecting the socio-pedagogical, or the fundamental social competencies, cultural understandings, and ethical dimensions that are germane to the sporting context. Therefore, the first author was often invited to provide an alternative (social sciences) approach which became valued and embedded within curricula. It was, initially, a small-scale intensive interjection to the undergraduate degree programme in sport that served the purpose of trialling a possible structure, content, and delivery for a semester-long compulsory module for master's students in sports coaching (which commenced in 2023). To prevent disrupting the host university's taught sessions, the pilot programme took place over five consecutive days before the end-of-year assessment period. It was delivered by the lead author who had participated in Erasmus+ teaching mobility schemes in the nation for over a decade and was familiar with the content and delivery of the degree programmes and the student demographic.

17 Lithuanian student-athletes/coaches (10 women and seven men; aged 19-28) who had completed their first or second year in a sport-related degree programme volunteered to participate in the non-credit bearing programme. The students were performance athletes/coaches in various sports (i.e. football, basketball, handball, rowing, canoeing, judo, and volleyball), who were currently or previously competing for (age-grade) national teams or former athletes who had taken on coaching roles and were working in sports clubs. The programme consisted of a week-long series of



workshops on topics relating to safe sport. That is, the content reflected current trends in academic literature, policy, and activity from athlete advocacy groups (e.g. EU Athletes, IOC Athletes' Commission), and areas that were not discussed in-depth in the degree programmes. These included: abuse/maltreatment, early specialisation, eating disorders, sexism, ableism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, use of performance-enhancing substances, match-fixing, and transitions within and out of sport. The participants were given breakfast/lunch and, at the end of the week, a hoodie/sweatshirt they had designed.

Workshops were conducted in English which is spoken by around 30 per cent of the population (Statistics Lithuania, 2022) and is included as part of their university degree. As such, the participating student-athletes were, to varying degrees, comfortable and competent speaking in English. The content emphasis was on introducing learners to, and developing familiarity with safe sport, and fulfilling an aim to better position them as change makers within the sport industry. Yet, these intentions sat in synergy with the focus on providing a positive, engaging and meaningful learning experience, and to challenge some of the established social and cultural assumptions and norms of learning and education that they were familiar (e.g. didactic learning processes, rigidly structured classroom setups).

Accordingly, whereas programme learning outcomes focused on safe sport, the pedagogical decisions made in shaping the session, the ways sessions unfolded, and the receptiveness of the students, were as much about the specific content as the learning processes (specifically, teaching methods and confidence with communication). The first author's reflections and the focus group excerpts included in the ensuing narrative primarily relate to the learning process. The workshops were designed so information was presented from a variety of sources in a range of ways, for example, using interactive classroom technologies (Padlet, Vevox, Kahoot – educational technologies used for polling, discussions, sharing content, quizzes), case studies of athletes, and videos and photographs of problematic practices. To maximise engagement, and mitigate confidence issues with the English language, students were provided with ways to demonstrate and communicate their understanding of, and concerns about, the subject beyond the verbal (e.g. via illustrations, posters, photographs, TikTok videos) (Radin & Light, 2022).

At the end of the week, all 17 participants agreed to partake in focus group interviews with the first author. The student-athlete cohort was divided into three focus groups which reflected the working groups the learners had informally organised in the classroom, each comprising of 4–7 participants. The discussion focused on the content of the programme and the delivery, specifically, on what they liked and areas that could be improved. Three months later, a virtual focus group interview with nine participants took place through which the students discussed if their experiences of sport had changed post-programme. All focus group interviews lasted approximately 45 min and were recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The transcripts were analysed in light of the research aims, paying close attention to comments about the content, structure and delivery of the workshops. This close reading revealed themes relating to the overarching classroom experience, the interactions in the workshops, opportunities to be creative, and participate and engage in ways they felt most comfortable. The subsequent narrative consists of the researcher's reflections (which were gleaned from post-session debriefs and an informal interview with co-authors (see Howley et al., 2024) that asked critical questions about the experience and underlying decision-making) and quotations from the focus groups. This reflective approach served an important role in questioning the language and concepts used by the lead author to ascribe meaning to particular classroom interactions, dialogues and the students' interpretations of their experiences (e.g. what meanings were possible when a participant commented in English that the activity 'felt' or 'was' experienced in a certain way, and the inferences and limitations that might be able to be drawn from the exchange). In addition, the collaborative process amongst the authors afforded a check on the lead author's positionality within the research setting and proximity to the participants. Here, the rigour was aided by the critical considerations about language, concepts and ideas in

research, as Hughes et al. (2019) advocate. The terminal point of this process was when a consensus was achieved with regards to the meaning being the ‘best’ representation of what we felt was occurring.

### ***A critical narrative of constructing and delivering a ‘Safe sport’ education programme in Lithuania***

As scholars identify (e.g. Bedenlier et al., 2018; Kahn & Agnew, 2017; Leask, 2013), and as illustrated in the experience articulated below, working in transnational and/or international education settings may subsequently bring to light, and generate existential and pedagogical contemplation of, some of the foundational principles and assumptions about effective teaching in global education. In the case of this paper, these considerations informed, for example, contextualised understanding, reflective practice, re-orientating perspectives, consideration of ethical responsibilities, cultural relativism and negotiating *in situ* generalities and particularities of the classroom. Educators may, invariably, find themselves acculturated, over time, to the distinct domestic settings abroad in which they teach. Nonetheless, issues of students’ (and their own) language competency, conceptualisation and translation of ideas, development of culturally attuned sensibilities and creation of meaningful learning environments remain ongoing challenges (Dafouz, 2018; Kahn & Agnew, 2017). However, such issues become compounded further when addressing content that is unfamiliar, sensitive, or challenging (such might be the case in addressing aspects of safe sport and ethical responsibilities of sports workers, or other critical issues within).

Here, sport educators are fortunate to be able to draw upon a wealth of internationalisation research (Chen, 2022; Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018; Davies & Ströbel, 2022; De Leersnyder et al., 2022; Springer et al., 2020), and parallel work in sport for development (Nols et al., 2019; Oxford & Spaaij, 2020; Sandford et al., 2022), that provides encouragement and suggestions for how inclusive, engaging, meaningful and responsible educational experiences may be crafted. Yet in the following case, while situating ourselves in new terrain may elicit trepidation, it also has catalysed constant revision to how and why we teach as we do. We present a constructed narrative of the experience with italicised content reflecting the lecturer’s *in situ* thoughts with an intermediary section denoting a *post hoc* analytical critique from the wider research team. The narrative is organised in light of themes that illustrate the relationship between building language-sensitivities and the development of positive classroom experiences and the establishment of comfortable spaces for student communication. These themes explored in the narrative echo the previously mentioned tenets of an internationalised and inclusive pedagogy, which we phrase as: ‘Sensitivity to language’, ‘Learning to read the room: Sensitivity to the cohort’, ‘Finding rhythm: Delivering socially/culturally/politically/ethically critically framed content’ and ‘Enduring effects: Meaningful connections with learners’.

#### ***Sensitivity to language***

*The programme begins. The sessions start at 9:30-15:30 EET. This means it is 7:30–13:30 (GMT). I forgot about this part of teaching mobility! It’s not as bad as that year when I engaged in Erasmus+ and had a lecture at 8 am (6 am BST), but it still isn’t pleasant. I hope my brain kicks in soon. I’ve heard that 17 students who are top-performance athletes are on the programme. Some have travelled in from another city because the university has invited students from their two campuses, so I already feel pressure to ensure I deliver a very good programme.*

*The cohort has arrived. It is comprised of first – and second-year students. The first years stick together and don’t mix with the second years, and vice versa, so I wonder how the week will go. I usually rely on reading body language or listening to discussions, but this won’t work, because I can’t understand Lithuanian! I can pick out a word or two but I’m worried that they might be saying that they don’t want to be here or questioning why they agreed to participate. I feel uncomfortable and to calm myself, I aim to simply use the first day to feel out the situation, to get comfortable, and see how they react. I also need to ensure communication is clear – this is important because it could be a sensitive*

topic, although I am not asking students to reflect on personal experiences, rather, we are looking at the issues more generally.

In synergy with research noting the value of sensitising and adjusting to language/communication particularities in (intercultural) classrooms (Cadman & Song, 2012; Kahn & Agnew, 2017; Li, 2018), the students and I worked together to consider conceptual definitions, explore ethical/moral foundations of what safe sport is, discuss how organisational barriers may be overcome etc., and develop social actions (for example, see Purdy & Lang, 2023). Yet, within this, I endeavoured to do so in ways that did not privilege or position English-language/Western-hegemonic frameworks as central or immutable (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). Specifically, I drew upon the learners' experiences, language, and understanding to challenge constructs and established approaches, and consider their social and cultural relevance within their current lives and settings. This enabled students to critically consider ways change might be manifested within their own situations and/or future work in/beyond sport. To note, in drawing (literal and figurative) connections between sport and the wider world and broader issues there is an inherent social justice and global citizenship ethos, and critical pedagogical, influence at work. While as educators we are aligned with the ethics and intentions of this scholarship, this was not foremost an overarching theme of the session. Rather, the initial mission was to create a comfortable space for engagement that might solicit learning or at least productive discussions and interactions.

### **Learning to read the room: sensitivity to the cohort**

*On the first day, I give the students markers, gel pens and packs of A3 paper. The aim was to use the materials to respond to questions or take notes about their group discussions creatively and playfully. The students mostly work in pairs, and they seem to be pleased with the emerging drawings. At times, some of them use their phones to translate concepts or phrases to which they are unfamiliar. They exchange in Lithuanian and then report back (writing, speaking) in English.*

*On the second day, a subject specialist provides an online lecture on eating disorders. I am with them in the classroom and notice that the students disengage. I am disappointed that this didn't work better and plan to ask students for feedback. When I do, after the lecture, the students tell me that they found the session less engaging, even though they view the topic as important. They also say that the technologies that the lecturer used were good, but that they prefer in-person delivery. I consider whether fatigue with online learning due to COVID-19 could have contributed to student disengagement. Extending this, might I need to make changes to the activities I have planned for the remaining days? I decide to call it quits and end the day a bit earlier. The students don't complain! As I leave the university, I run into a staff member of the Lithuanian university. She is happy to see me and keenly tells me that the students had told her that they have found the programme really interesting. I am surprised because I feel like I have to do a lot of work to get the students to stay on task and to share their views. I am desperate for further feedback, so I ask her for specifics: What is interesting? Is it the content? The pedagogy?' 'All of it', my Lithuanian colleague answers. With this feedback, I immediately start to relax.*

### **Finding rhythm: delivering socially/culturally/politically/ethically critically framed content**

*It's midweek and there is a rhythm to the sessions. The classroom atmosphere feels lighter, and the students increasingly share their opinions and ideas with the whole group. At the end of day 3, I ask the students to provide feedback on the week thus far. One student notes: 'It's very, very good for us because we get to practise English'. Another student comments: 'You're very good at including us ... and you're encouraging us to speak'.*

*With the confidence of the students' feedback, I start day 4. We are discussing transitions, so I use examples of Lithuanian athletes from various sports. The students react with surprise that I know about Lithuanian athletes. While I have their full attention, I include my entire Lithuanian vocabulary (about 12 words). The students laugh and I hope I have gained some brownie points.*

*As the session gains momentum, a couple of students, who can be relied on to share their opinions, use the workshop materials (paper and markers) to create paper aeroplanes. During the break, they*

*throw the planes down the university corridors. I am horrified. What if any of the university's staff see this? Are they bored or fatigued with the sessions? Or have they reached the point where they are too tired to learn in English? My anxieties grow as I consider how to respond, but I am filled with guilt as I think about how I have been pushing them in terms of physical and intellectual engagement and understanding of a (potentially new) subject in English. I resolve the situation by giving the students a longer break and the students appear to be happy to have extra time to themselves.*

*The next day, the students arrive in, what I sense, is a better condition. The conversations develop nicely, and the atmosphere was more relaxed than it had been earlier in the week. I also notice that the students have gained additional comfort around each other. During one of the breaks, a first-year student plays Eminem's 'Lose Yourself' on the classroom piano (the sessions were held in a music academy). Some of the students gather around the piano and cheer his effort. I enjoy watching the scene. Looking around the room, I am particularly happy to see that the three students (one male and two females) who haven't engaged much in class and with me, are still attending and appear to be enjoying conversing with their teammates who are also in the class. They're not confident in English, but I can see they are comfortable participating through writing or via their colleagues who are more comfortable with English. I make a note to ask the students for feedback on how to better include learners with less language competence/confidence in the sessions.*

*The remainder of the week passes without further incidents. As the last activity, I ask the students to reflect on the programme, specifically, the content, structure and delivery, I am pleased that one of the students with lower English language competence says that although he struggles to speak in English, he was listening. I used this as an opportunity to ask the group how I could better include students whose English isn't as strong. One student suggests that I could provide synonyms for terminology/phrasing that is more difficult. Another student says that they could support each other by translating. I am pleased with the contribution and consider the feedback as positive.*

### **Enduring effects: meaningful connections with learners**

*It's now several months after the project and I receive an email from one of the students who tells me that she and a peer would like to do a presentation on one of the topics we covered in the module (i.e. performance enhancing drugs in sport). They have already asked the university if they could present this to their colleagues. I am happy to hear from the students. Could it be that beyond achieving the learning outcomes to promote safe sport, I had succeeded in constructing a memorable and relevant environment in which there was content that resonated with some individuals?*

### **Final considerations**

Returning to the paper's aims, at a fundamental level, we utilised safe sport content to question the connection between our disciplinary knowledge and its delivery, our pedagogical preferences and privileges, cultural logics and social mores, and linguistic and conceptual limitations. As evidenced by peers within the field (e.g. Chen, 2022; Davies & Ströbel, 2022; Park et al., 2020), and reflected in the case of our current focus on safe sport curricula for specific HE audiences, this requires adopting a more considered approach to design and delivery. The experiences outlined in this paper reiterate, more pointedly, the focus on safe sport – a relatively new entrant into HE curricula in Lithuania – has also afforded fresh opportunities to design and implement curricula that differ from students' conventional learning environments, experiences and interactions. Here, our work contributes to understanding the realities of translanguaging and language sensitivities, co-construction of conceptual understandings, and the utility of blended learning and technology to facilitate rapport and confidence. Individual effectiveness of each of these notwithstanding, they worked in harmony to produce a 'safe' space for interaction, communication and learning. Longer-term resonance aside, the student dialogue and interactions at that immediate juncture pointed to a discernible if albeit momentary shift in their thinking and appreciation of an alternate educational approach.

A narrative offered a valuable approach to combine the intertwining and simultaneous practices and perspectives of teaching, being reflective, and research analysis in a way that better demonstrated the nuances of the context. This included: critically processing the experience by engaging with internationalisation practices, reflecting on the challenges the new environment wrought for content and pedagogical practice, and refining the methods and rationale employed for construction of inclusive teaching spaces. Our internationalised and inclusive pedagogical approach, thus, contributes to scholarly debates on enhancing trans-cultural education, language attentiveness, and challenging Westernised assumptions in (sport) education (Fovet, 2023; R'boul, 2022). Such endeavours have not been easy as they require perpetual reflection on our approaches, but also adjusting our mindsets and practices regarding inclusive and culturally responsive learning. All of which, on the ground, translate into constantly adapting content, addressing language nuances, improving local/national knowledge, redesigning classroom activities, and adopting new interactive approaches that encourage students to have the confidence to contribute and share on their own terms. As is a perennial issue for educators, approaches have required adaptation year-on-year as new cohorts present cause for further redevelopment.

Our work shares many similarities to what many others may be employing already. This work has shaped the insights and connections made in this paper but also continues to inform our ongoing practices in our respective HE institutes and international undertakings and collaborations. In this project, however, we have seen opportunities for critical sport scholars (e.g. such as those working in specific sub-disciplinary areas like Sport Management, Sociology of Sport, Physical Education or Sport Studies), and believe there remains scope for debate related to internationalisation and inclusive pedagogical practices. At the very least, more work is required that illustrates the issues, challenges, and potential within these spaces for new forms of thinking, doing and being. We are particularly encouraged here by the groundwork laid by peers in both Sport Management (e.g. Chen, 2022; Davies & Ströbel, 2022; de Haan & Sherry, 2012; Springer et al., 2020), and Sport-(for)-Development (e.g. Oxford & Spaaij, 2020), whose various work traverses and intertwines sport, global issues and themes around social justice, and has drawn to light the value of expanding our individual and collective cultural learning enterprises.

We make three recommendations for those educating in the international context:

1. To foreground that **development of inclusive pedagogy within internationalisation should happen with careful design**, not by default. When, for example, our initial forays into international education brought into sharp relief the limited dimensions of our current practices it necessitated a rethink of the relationship between our pedagogical approaches and subject content matter. Subsequent periods of engagement in internationalisation have then afforded opportunities to work more carefully on ourselves and curriculum design. The ongoing process has confirmed to us that inclusive (and also culturally responsive) pedagogies and practices do not emerge organically but must be carefully designed; especially if there are notable language, conceptual, and socio-cultural issues to overcome.
2. In our design processes (and mindful of the unfamiliarity/difficulty of the content), we endeavour to **be broad-minded as to what might work to facilitate content translation and resonance with students**. Central to this was deploying a range of methods, in concert with students, that widened opportunities for interaction and learning.
3. In extending the range of methods – and, in particular, attempting to overcome language confidence concerns – we found it purposeful to **incorporate a range of technologies and practices from the digital to analogue**. As student engagement noted, there appears to be an appreciation for crafting a learning space that promotes interactions and also enables learners to overcome language trepidations and connect to content in ways that matter to them.

Beyond these recommendations, the value in this work lies in illustrating and questioning how academics might be (more) effective international(ised) educators. A process which we consider,

fundamentally, requires humility, reflectiveness, resilience and willingness to change (and occasionally abandon) entrenched thought and practice. The advantages of this are, we have seen, forms of self and student empowerment, critical and productive exchange, and construction of potentially transformative spaces and moments. Building further, future research may usefully interrogate how translanguaging approaches might be advantageous for achieving wider education and social outcomes. In particular, with regards to, first, greater sensitivities and sensibilities to the individual and shared nature of global cultures; second, universal notions of equality, inclusion, diversity, citizenship, and democracy; and, third, prevailing issues such as sustainability and social justice. This paper has served to illustrate that while such concepts and debates transcend national borders and may be understood differently by people, the familiarity of sport and the commonalities of experience therein afford a useful space to engage students with these ideas. Accordingly, new work here might look towards how we might evaluate and/follow the journey individuals take from these experiences into future work/organisational settings in and beyond sport.

While we are reluctant to suggest the internationalised and inclusive pedagogical framework and class setting in this paper necessarily created a new cohort of progressive 'change-makers' or 'thought leaders', the hope remains that we might be able to better understand the roles of critical and globally-minded individual protagonists – who have experienced this sort of language/concept-based interaction, collaboration and dialogue – in nurturing organisation paradigm shifts and change. Nonetheless, this work represents a step on this pathway, and a pause for thought that our pedagogical vision and student learning outcomes do not happen by default, but rather must be considered in design and execution and pursued with degrees of hope.

## Notes

1. As defined by the IOC, the concept refers to 'an athletic environment that is respectful, equitable, and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to athletes' (Mountjoy et al., 2016: 2).
2. A white, female, Western academic who has been educated and resided in five nations.
3. The Turing Scheme is the UK government's initiative to support international opportunities in education and training. It enables UK organisations from higher education, further education, vocational education and schools to offer students life-changing experiences through study or work abroad (The Turing Scheme, n.d.).
4. The project received ethical approval (ETH2011-0191) from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee, Edge Hill University, UK.

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