

Encounters in the field: using the DAE-approach to train intercultural competences of students doing fieldwork in the Global South

Dr. Gery Nijenhuis (GEO/HG&SP), Dr. Veronique Schutjens (GEO/HG&SP) & Dr. Gemma Corbalan (SW/O&T)

g.nijenhuis@uu.nl; v.a.j.m.schutjens@uu.nl; g.corbalan@uu.nl

Introduction

Students in the MA-programme International Development Studies leave their classroom to do fieldwork on a wide range of development challenges in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Fieldwork is an essential component as it enables students to better understand the 'messiness' of 'geographical reality' and to gain a range of skills that are difficult to develop in the classroom alone. Well-developed intercultural competences - defined as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Deardorff 2006) - are essential to successfully carry out such fieldwork. However, immersion in a different cultural setting does not itself assure development of these competences: an active learning environment is needed to achieve this (Deardorff 2006; Huber & Reynolds 2014). Using the Describe-Analyse-Evaluate (DAE) approach for reflection, our intervention - in the context of a Comenius Senior project - aims at training students' intercultural competences through the use of student-fed cases that illustrate authentic fieldwork situations.

The aim of the poster is to provide insight into 1) the background and approach of the intervention; 2) the relevance and value of the DAE-approach for reflection and developing intercultural competences; and 3) the depth of reflection on intercultural encounters. **Our research question is: what are the results, in terms of level of reflection, of using the DAE approach for reflection on intercultural encounters in fieldwork situations?**



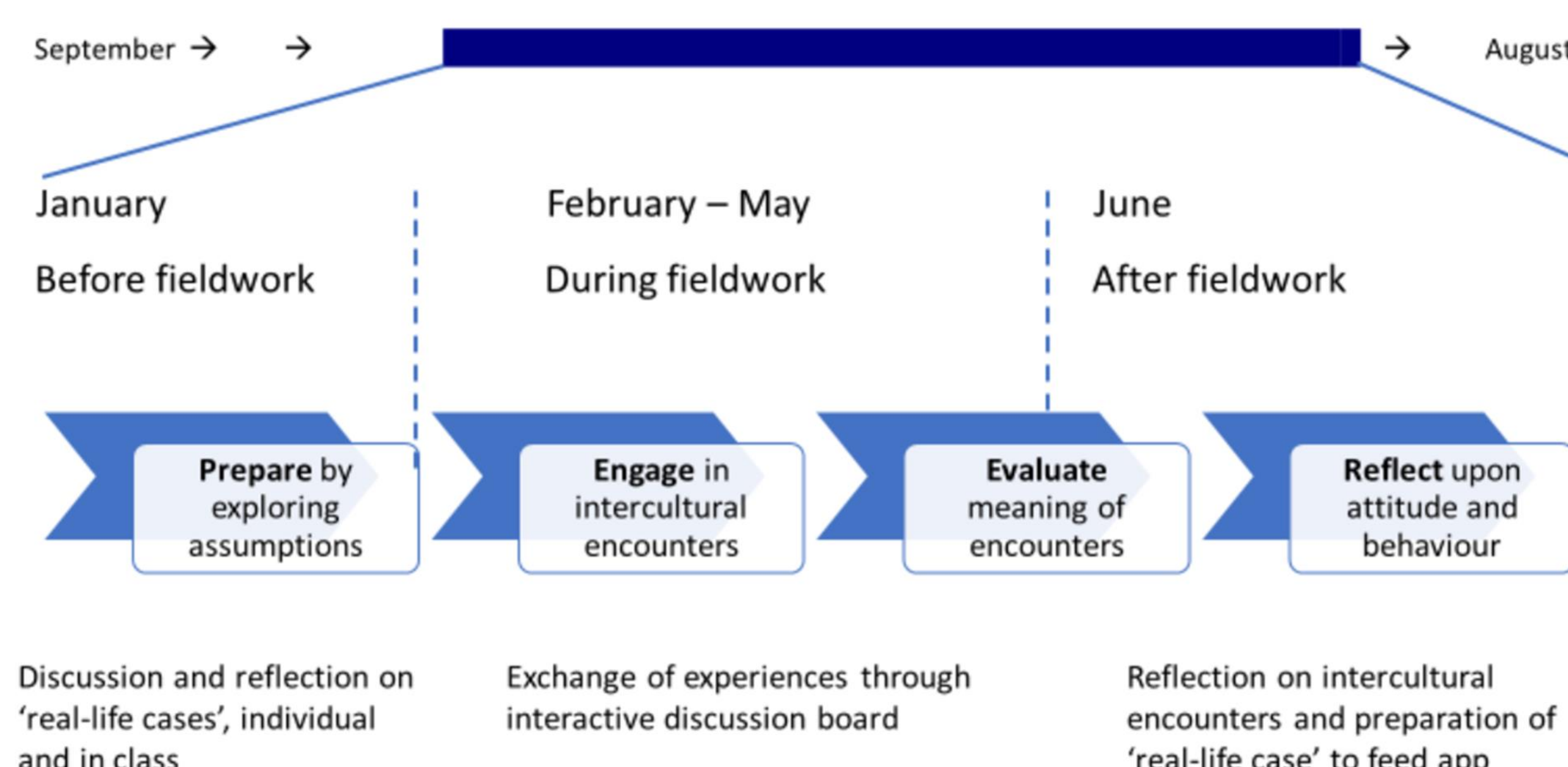
Figure 1. Doing fieldwork in Bolivia

Methods

We used a qualitative approach and analysed students' answers to two assignments which they submitted via an online form. The first assignment (N= 61) aimed to train the reflection skills of students and to make them familiar with the DAE-approach. In the second assignment (N=36) students analysed encounters in the field experienced by previous cohorts of students, using the DAE-approach. The authors independently coded and analyzed the reflections of the students in a qualitative way, focusing on the themes addressed and the depth of reflection. We averaged the scores obtained in this way. At the end, 51 students evaluated the assignments for training of intercultural competences.

Figure 2. Timeline of the intervention

The intervention aims to enhance the intercultural competences of students through 1) the use of authentic cases that represent fieldwork situations, submitted by students; and 2) the development of assignments that are linked to these cases. These are believed to guide student reflection and discussion, both as preparation and during and after fieldwork. We use the PEER-approach: **P**repare - **E**ngage - **E**valuate - **R**eflect (Holmes & O'Neill 2012).



The assignments

In the **first assignment** students were asked to reflect on an event they all very recently experienced: the fire alarm during their first exam in the master programme. Forty minutes after the start of the exam, the fire alarm in the Educatorium went off, and they all needed to leave the exam room, with quite some consequences, as after 30 minutes the exam committee declared the exam invalid, and all students needed to retake the exam at a later moment. They used the Describe - Analyse - Evaluate approach to reflect on this event. For the **second assignment**, we asked students to reflect on cultural encounters experienced by students from previous years. An example of such encounter is presented below.

An example of a cultural encounter

For my research on access to urban services in Phnom Penh, I needed data on sanitation in the city, so in my first week, I went to town hall, to ask for this data - of course, being the local government, in charge of everything, they would have this information! This was not so easy, as the first one I talked to directed me to his colleague. This guy asked me to send a written request to his supervisor, which I did, explaining the importance of the data for my research. After a week, I still hadn't received a reply, so I went to the office of the supervisor, but he was a busy man, and asked me to make an appointment, which I did, several times actually, as he never showed up or was in a lengthy meeting. Once I ran in to him just before our meeting, he was leaving his office! Not that he was not friendly: he was always very polite, asking me how I was doing, very friendly, but no data and also attempts to discuss this were frustrated. First, I thought: 'OK, this is what working in another context means, this is just a time issue, one just needs some perseverance'. Later on, I felt annoyed, and also frustrated, and I simply didn't know what to do to get the data.

The first question was to jot down their first thoughts, after having read the description. After having done this, a second question popped up, asking students to critically analyse how their first thoughts are culturally influenced. The original assignment contains more questions, for this poster, we only consider these two questions.

Results

Assignment 1, the DAE-approach. The DAE approach helped students to structure their reflection, although some students mixed up the Describe and Analyse-step. Regarding the contents of the reflections, it appeared that one third of the students focused exclusively on their own position, when describing, analyzing and evaluation the meaning of the event. The other third applied a mix - focusing partly on their own position, but also analyzing the role of others'. A final third included in their reflection the position of others - peer and/or instructor - illustrating much more awareness of the context, as is shown in this quote: *When I looked at the instructor, it seemed like she was confused as well, and was hesitating a moment to think about what the right cause of action would be.*

Assignment 2, the reflection on authentic intercultural encounters. Asked for their first thoughts, the far majority of students mentions that they share the view point of the student. In addition, they mainly do so from their own cultural background (see Table 1).

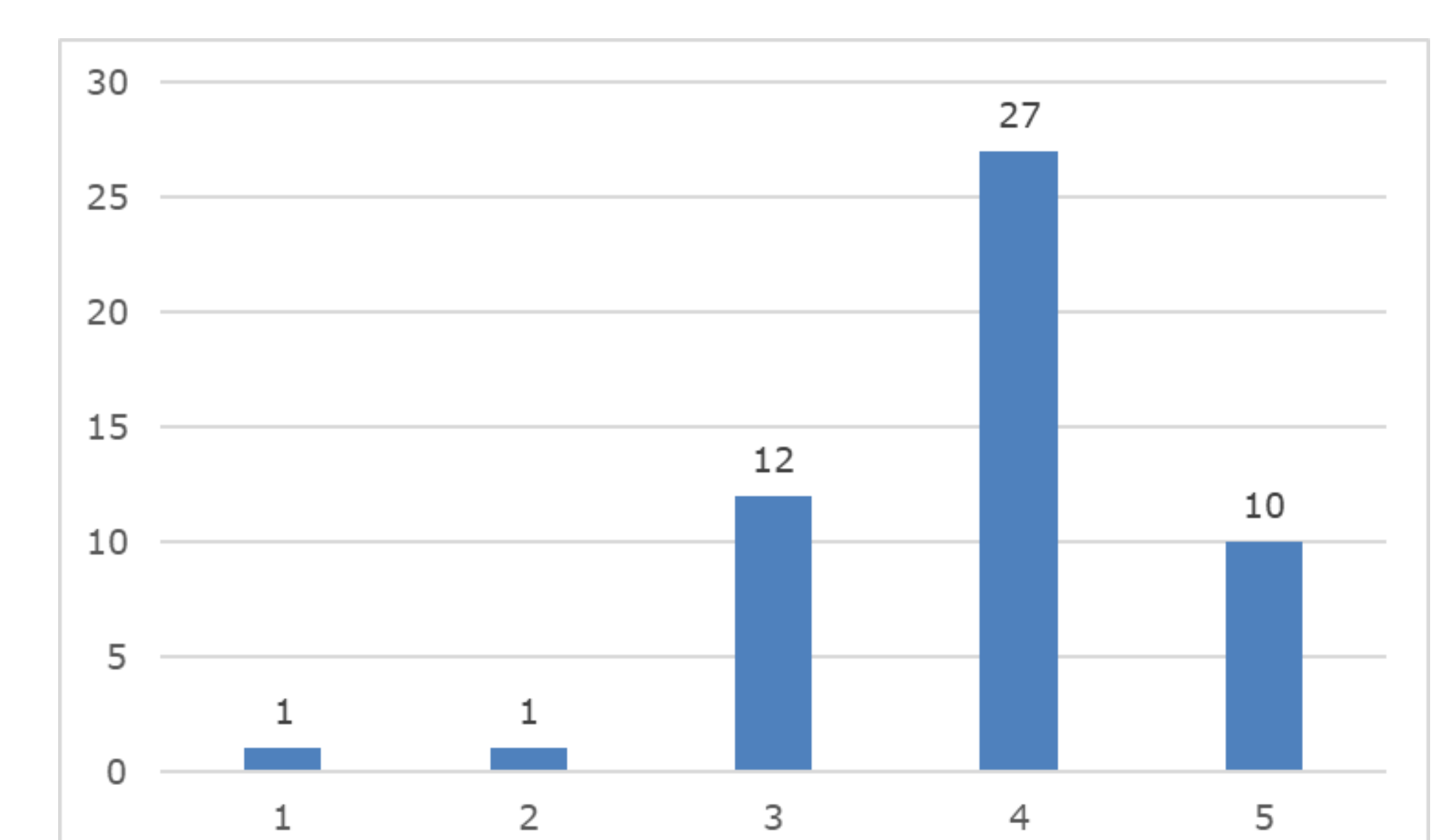
Table 1. Scores of reflections on authentic intercultural encounter (Assignment 2, N=36)

Scores	Q1: first thoughts	Q2: culturally influenced?
0 - 0.5 = reasoning only from own cultural background	53%	25%
1 - 1.5 = some reflection, though superficial	41%	61%
2 = deeper reflection, self-awareness	6%	14%

As one student puts it: *I can understand why the student feels annoyed and frustrated, and I think I would feel the same way.* Only very few students include at this point the other cultural background. An example of a first thought that does include such other perspective: *'To a degree, this is understandable in the sense that a student coming to look at your work just for three months and write about it may not seem pressing or truly important [to the civil servant]'*. The answers to the second question, the way their thoughts are culturally influenced, show much more awareness of differences. Some students remain close to their own cultural frame: *I don't believe that people with other cultural backgrounds do not share this value.* Most students however are able to look at their expectations from more distance, and comment upon the normative framework they are inclined to use: *The way we think about them, or the way they act is influenced by the things we think are normal, good and the best way to handle. If someone acts different it seems wrong in our cultural references.*

Training intercultural competences: the opinion of the students

Figure 3. Answers to the statement 'The two cases for Assignment 7 were suitable to learn to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of the intercultural setting of the research' (N=51, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much)



Concluding remarks

- The DAE-approach is a simple and straight-forward tool to structure reflection. However, for deeper reflection, other guiding questions are needed, as is also shown in the analysis of the second assignment.
- When confronted with a cultural encounter, students remain close to their own cultural frame. By adding a prompting question, they show deeper reflection and more self-awareness.

References

Deardorff, D.K (2006), Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in Higher Education*, 10, 241 - 266.

Holmes, P. & G. O'Neill (2012), Developing and evaluating intercultural competence: Ethnographies of intercultural encounters. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 36, 707- 718.

Huber, J. & C. Reynolds (2014), *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Pestalozzi Series 3, Council of Europe.