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Implementation of the Socrates/Erasmus Program in the Case Study of the Cooperation between the University of Silesia (Poland) and Centre de Formation Pédagogique (France)

Abstract

The present text with minor alterations was presented during my stay in El Camino College, California, USA, where I visited from October 4th to October 31st 2006 within the frameworks of the Fullbright Institutional Partnership Grant

It presents areas and ways of the realisation of and benefits resulting from participation in the international Socrates/Erasmus program realised by two educational institutions – Polish and French. It is illustrated with authentic examples from my experience gained over a number of years, when I held the function of the program coordinator.

When presented to the French students and lecturers this text was supplemented with a multi-media presentation – photographs of a number of international projects carried out in Cieszyn and Cambrai. It commanded great interest of the American students and lecturers, which found prompt expression in establishing new contacts between the lecturers of El Camino College, USA and the Centre de Formation Pédagogique, France.

Key words: *Socrates/Erasmus program, international cooperation, intercultural education*

In my presentation I would like to talk about the Socrates/Erasmus program of interuniversity cooperation, which I coordinate. The program involves cooperation between the University of Silesia in Cieszyn, Poland and Centre de Formation Pédagogique in Cambrai, France.

Socrates is the European Union program for education of children, young people and adults. "Its aim is to promote the European dimension in education by encouraging cooperation between the participating countries. It also aims to enhance the knowledge of other European countries, develop the sense of unity with Europe and support the adjustment to the new social and economic conditions in the united Europe." (Wójcik, 2001:2)

The Socrates program encompasses a number of programs specifically targeted at different levels and kinds of education. Erasmus is the higher education Action of Socrates. It consists of many different activities; student and teacher exchanges, joint development of study programs (Curriculum Development) and introducing elements concerning the European integration into the curricula.

The cooperation between the University of Silesia in Cieszyn and Centre de Formation Pédagogique in Cambrai is an example of the continual growth of the international education community. Its roots go back to private contacts between lecturers, exchanges of courtesy greetings between them and finally the first visit of the director of CFP at the University in Cieszyn in April 2000.

It was decided that the cooperation will be realized in the area of training teachers of early primary education (with elements of foreign languages.)

Due to some differences between curricula and taking into account the language barrier – a formula of exchange was adopted different from the one which is usually practised within the frameworks of international programs. For two years now the Polish students of early primary education have been going to France for a period of four months (from September to December). They have taken part in the classes and lectures intended by the program of studies in CFP in Cambrai for the first and second year students. Apart from that they have done pedagogical training in a number of schools. They have observed and run classes for pupils in the lower grades, in which they talked about Polish traditions and culture.

Polish lecturers also have a chance to go abroad, give lectures or workshops and visit schools and nursery school.

Due to the fact that the students and lecturers from CFP do not have any knowledge of the Polish language it was decided that their visits to Poland will take a different form. Our university invites a group of students and lecturers from France at the same time. Apart from lectures given by their French professors the students gain practical experience in teaching a foreign language as part of their study program. They run a short class of a foreign language of their choice (French, English or German) for pupils of grades I to III in one of the Cieszyn primary schools.

The visiting groups also take part in various classes for prospective teachers of early primary education conducted at the university, e.g. music classes, pottery workshops, French classes, methodology of teaching maths, etc.

From the beginning the educational and scientific cooperation between the two institutions took a different form from that usually practised by universities. In case of CFP in Cambrai and the University of Silesia in Cieszyn we can talk of truly friendly and family relationships.

A special sign of the cordiality of these relationships is the help offered by both the students and lecturers from the Centre de Formation Pédagogique in Cambrai through the activity of the association “Enseigner Là-Bas”, which they founded for this very purpose. They take initiative to help the Polish students in France who demand specialist medical care or special medication. They also take part in projects “over the borders”, organized by the Academic Association of Social Assistance functioning at Cieszyn University.

It can also be seen at the personal level that the relationships between the cooperating parties are continually being strengthened. Through private contacts people keep up what was first formal international exchange. They send mail using the traditional way or the Internet. While they are away on exchange visits both students and lecturers can take part in all current events which take place in the area where they live and work every day owing to the swift transfer of information. Let us name but a few joyful events such as weddings, births, jubilees and also the sad ones as funerals...

The contacts which go beyond the formal scientific and educational cooperation are cultivated during holidays spent in Poland or in France. They are tightened during sightseeing visits of both countries and while comparing the lifestyles and conditions of life of the families. Long, virtually never-ending conversations about anything and everything: economy and politics in the era of Poland joining the European Union go on usually at ... family tables laden with food, which is conducive to opening up for each other and for the countries of the guests and visitors, their traditions and customs... Let us just recall the tradition of sharing the Christmas wafer which has been celebrated in the homes of French lecturers for a few years now and seems like it is already feeling at home there.

In summary, the goals of the international and interuniversity cooperation which I have aimed to present to you can be viewed in the three following areas:

- Firstly, it is the international and intercultural education (opening for other people, communication, getting to know other cultures and mentalities – trying to understand “the other”).
- Secondly, it is teacher training (acquiring praxeological and communicational competence as well as the skills of successful cooperation.) Thirdly, gaining experience of work with children from another culture and language (which obviously remains in close connection with the former two areas.)

Bibliography

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