



Between tradition and present. Implementation of folk art and culture into the foreign language education of high school students

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the issue of folk art and culture and its interconnection with the foreign language education of high school students. In this paper we would like to share our experience with implementation of an international project Comenius entitled *Folk Art and its Influence on European Culture* which has been created by nine high schools from Europe and was launched in 2013. This project contains two basic dimensions : (inter)cultural and (pluri)lingual. We will discuss about our visions and actual educational results not only on cultural level but also on lingual level as an innovative element of foreign language education.

Keywords

folk art and culture, foreign language education, project

1 Introduction

This article deals about our experience with implementation of folk art and culture into the foreign language education of high school students, especially French language education.

Within the Faculty of Education at Catholic University in Ružomberok we have in years 2009 – 2012 successfully implemented an extensive project entitled *Discovering of the Lost in Time (Arts and Crafts of Ethnographic Character of Liptov and Orava regions)*. The most important outcome of the project was the establishment of an excellent academic workplace named C-ET-ART (Center of Ethnography and Art) with a unique academic collection including numerous artifacts as a result of extensive research activities. This project became a useful platform for another project which was launched by the state grammar school in Ružomberok in 2013. We talk about the project Comenius entitled *Folk Art and its Influence on European Culture*. This project has been created by nine European high schools (concretely from France, Wales, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland) interested in discovering particular domains of folk art in each other's territory and also the ongoing impact of folk art on contemporary culture. The project contains two basic dimensions: cultural and lingual.



In the framework of the cultural dimension we can point out a necessity to return to local identities, to be able to live together thanks to a shared observation of different cultural aspects. Thanks to the project exchange programme, students can experience Europe through different social and geographical environments what is the ideal way to reduce or eliminate prejudices or stereotypes. The use of foreign languages in the context of a common students research topic is a motivating element of the project which aims to stimulate learning of more than one foreign language. We hope that working together in foreign languages will raise the level of motivation to progress linguistically. Thus, the project creates an added plurilingual value what is a great challenge not only for students but also for their teachers.

In this paper we would like to share our experience with implementation of the both projects and to discuss about our results not only on cultural level but also on lingual level as a part of foreign language education.

2 Two projects creating the space for a perfect symbiosis between academic research and educational practice

In this part of article we would like to focus our attention on concepts of two basic projects which serve us to realize our educational activities with high school students. Firstly we will offer insight into successfully accomplished project *Discovering of the Lost in Time*, which can be considered as a good starting platform for quality and also professional implementation of actually running international Comenius project *Folk Art and its Influence on European Culture* with the beginning in September 2013.

2.1 Discovering of the Lost in Time (Arts and Crafts of Ethnographic Character of Liptov and Orava regions)

This project was realized with the support of operational programme Research and Development within the European Regional Development Fund from October 2009 to February 2012 at the Faculty of Education of Catholic University in Ruzomberok.

Our principal aim was to discover, record and continue to develop ethnographical riches specialized in traditional folk fine and music art in regions of Liptov and Orava. The project is rather a pilot project with long-term integration of themes on folk regions of Slovakia into the educational, artistic and research environment of the Catholic University in Ruzomberok.

The project provided a space for many activities. We would like to mention some of them, which we consider the main pillars of the implementation of principal project ideas:



- introductory congress *Present dimension of folk art and culture*, within the frame of which was realized an international conference *Present values of folk culture and art in education*, seminar, creative workshops, concerts, exhibitions;
- terrain research *Meeting in time with folk culture of Liptov and Orava* collecting ethnographical artifacts and charting of presence of “living” traditional crafts in regions of Liptov and Orava;
- establishing the *Center of Ethnography and Art (C-ET-ART)* which represents a unique academic workplace with a precious collection of various folk artifacts useful not only for educational and research purposes but also for realization of therapeutic creative workshops (music therapy, art therapy, ergotherapy);
- cycle of creative workshops *Conjunction of the tradition and the present* including the realization of five workshops intended to students and teachers of music and arts (*Simplicity and beauty, Search for the archetype in the community and country, Musical art, Craft has a golden bottom, Art in craft and music*);
- final art festival *Discovered in Time* was the last activity which solemnly completed the project by exhibition, concerts, creative workshops, conference and colloquium.

One of the most important project results and outputs is the Center of Ethnography and Art (C-ET-ART). This center is open not only for students of Catholic university (especially students of arts, preschool and elementary pedagogy and social work) but also for pupils from primary and secondary schools, art schools, music schools and also for children from orphanages, their tutors and educators (the center provides creative workshops, courses of ergotherapy, music and art therapy).

The mission of this center is to collect and update the material and spiritual artifacts of traditional culture of Slovak regions, as well as beyond them, at the academic grounds. When we were preparing this project we had in mind particularly the principal goal which was to create an area for development of folk culture and art education. At that time we still had no idea that our project will expand its mission and will find its application in French language education of high school students involved in the international project Comenius entitled *Folk Art and its influence on European Culture*.

2.2 Folk Art and its Influence on European Culture

In a European context we feel more and more a necessity to return to local identities, to be able to live together. We feel also a need to remind our students



as a future generation of their own roots. The project entitled *Folk Art and its influence on European Culture* that we started to implement within a state grammar school in Ruzomberok in cooperation with seven more European high schools (unfortunately Italian partner resigned before the start of project), has for its object to allow our students to discover the folk art in each other's territory and the continuing impact of folk art on contemporary culture.

3 Research and educational problems

In this time of advanced technologies we feel the will to give to our students opportunity to raise their awareness of their cultural heritage. The schools involved to the project are situated in a variety of areas, from large towns to rural communities. By experiencing Europe through different social and geographical environments, our students share the desire to construct a common understanding of our cultural past and present. Through a greater understanding of their own culture, promoting their own culture to foreign partners, we expect our students to develop their awareness both of their own identity and likewise of a common European identity. This project is a perfect way how to reduce or eliminate prejudices and stereotypes.

We would like to open our students' eyes on their surrounding folk heritage in terms of traditional crafts, folk art and music, architecture, dance, clothing, textile techniques, production of everyday objects, gastronomy, literature and legends. These different aspects of popular culture are thematically concentrated in one partner country. During the project realization periode, each partner organizes one week meeting for all partners. Different partner teams come to this meeting prepared. Every meeting is preceded by serious research on the proposed theme to be able to carry out the activities planned during the next visit. Slovak students do their research in the above-mentioned Center of Ethnography and Art (C-ET-ART). This research is led by experienced university pedagogues, language teachers and ethnographers.

Main educational objectives

We can pronounce these main objectives which lead our principal educational activities :

- to stimulate students to learning of more than one foreign language;
- to give to our students opportunity to raise their awareness of their cultural heritage;
- to get students to encounter other cultures;
- to offer opportunities for students from different countries to work together and understand different ideas and approaches;



- to live cultural experiences abroad and to create a dialogue between Western and Eastern cultures;
- to look for the connection between local folk art and European identity;
- to reduce or eliminate prejudices and stereotypes;
- to improve skills of using modern IT technologies by students and teachers.

Strategies and activities to achieve the objectives

The first step to start to accomplish these objectives was held on institutional level. The project became a priority within each partner institution by creating European Comenius space on the schools' websites to inform the local community about project activities and products and by including the subjects of the projects into curriculums in all schools.

We can resume basic educational activities into three groups: preparatory research activities, meetings in partner countries and preparation of project outputs.

Preparatory research activities are held on institutional level in cooperation with all partners. The giving tasks are properly connected with the topic of the next exchange students' mobility. These tasks are adapted according to students' age, abilities and skills to involve possibly all students in all stages of work on projects. We try to heighten students' awareness of local folk art by manipulating and learning craft techniques. Slovak team has an opportunity to accomplish the proposed practical tasks in the above-mentioned Center of Ethnography and Art (C-ET-ART).

Meetings in partner countries strengthen the students' self-confidence and both national and European identity through learning about different aspects of European folk arts, having experiences of the project activities and meeting other students of the partner schools. Meetings differ according to the topic which deals one of the proposed domain of folk art and culture. Students are experiencing a teenager's everyday life elsewhere in Europe and establishing lifelong friendships. They are encountering new education, family and social climates. In the framework of exchange programme they are also participating in regular lessons in each host country in the local language and thus they can better understand the importance of communication and speaking foreign languages. They can personally live new experiences of dance, singing, performing music together, acting, making pottery, cooking and eating, public speaking and presentation skills.

The cooperation of foreign language teachers of all schools is important during the meetings but also on the Internet to work out some study materials and project outputs. Teachers are also confronting their own teaching techniques



with those practised over the borders to enrich, question and innovate their individual and team activity.

Particular topics by country

France (Lycée Polyvalent Hector Berlioz, Côte St. André) – influence of folk music on Berlioz’s music and folk music in general;

Wales (Caerleon Comprehensive School, Caerleon) – traditional weaving techniques, spinning and the use of wool;

Hungary (Zrinyi Miklos Gimnazium, Zalaegerszeg) – folk influence on rural architecture, each team prepared and presented a short film about local building craft techniques;

Poland (IV Liceum Ogólnokształcące imienia Henryka Sienkiewicza, Częstochowa) – local folklore in the writing of Sienkiewicz, folk influence on literature, each team will prepare a short text to illustrate the cohabitation of local history and literature;

Romania (Colegiul National "Mihai Eminescu", Buzau) – folk influence on contemporary fashion, exploration of traditional dress and its continuing presence today. Each partner prepares for the fashion review by obtaining or making clothes for the show and practising for the presentation;

Czech Republic (Mendelovo gymnázium, Opava) – legends and folk tales;

Bulgary (Vocational Technical High School "Vasil Levski", Vidin) – architecture and urban development, analysis of local architecture;

Slovakia (Gymnázium Ružomberok) – folk dance, closing project festival which will gather together the topics studied over the two years. An exhibition of the various folk art productions from the two years of the exchange will be displayed.

Partial and expected results

- *project web-site* to inform public about all local and common project activities;
- *online dictionary* which lists vocabulary and expressions specific to the folk art domain (general, music, architecture, cooking, handicrafts, literature, fashion) and which is constantly completed by all participants in their national languages;
- *newsletters* which sum up the week in each host partner country;
- *students’ facebook page* where teams post information about their work;
- *blog* to put on some photos and videos of each meeting, but also to post the participants’ reactions and commentaries;
- *recipe book* to collect national dishes and specialities of each partner country;



- *short films and powerpoint synopsis* of folk art aspects and influences in students' own language, in English or in French;
- *original recordings of local folk songs*;
- *confection of clothes* for the fashion show.

This project offers many opportunities for students from different countries to work together and to understand different views, ideas and approaches. It is very important for young people to compare ideas, opinions, problems, interests to develop a spirit of unity. It is supposed to emphasise the significance of mutual understanding and cooperation in order to have an intensive European dialogue, and to continue building Europe with respect to each other's individual features.

Besides gaining experience, perfecting the students' language skills will certainly help them to learn more about the other countries. All participants will be more aware of cultural differences; but able to see that there are many more similarities and shared aspects among us all. And this is the space for participating teachers to appropriately incorporate these different aspects of intercultural education into the foreign language education.

4 Plurilingual education and its implementation into the project context

As we have already indicated in the previous text, one of the most important objectives of our partner cooperation is to stimulate learning of more than one foreign language and getting students to encounter other cultures. It is therefore necessary to adapt foreign language curricula, especially for us, the French language curricula. We need to cooperate with cross-disciplinary teaching teams to visit the subject through history, geography, philosophy, literature, music, art, and of course modern languages.

Mother tongue has an important place in the framework of the project activities. It is allowed even for presentations of students' research results in combination with English or French language. Thus, students listen and know the mother tongue of each partner. Our students can develop the vocabulary related to the folk art and text writing skills while preparing and editing the contributions to the online dictionary or newsletters. We consider this plurilingual aspect as an added value of the project. Within stay in Wales (February 2014) and Hungary (April 2014), the Welsh and Hungarian partner organized everyday language sessions. During these sessions, students and teachers taught and learned each other's languages. At the end of these stays, each participant was able to introduce himself and to say a few basic phrases in Welsh, French, Bulgarian, Romanian, Hungarian, Polish, Czech or Slovak language.



In point of foreign languages, students improve their foreign language skills mainly in English and French language through compiling the online dictionary, editing the newsletter, translating the materials for activities during the visits, writing the multilingual protocols of activities, taking part in the language lessons in the partner schools, chatting and mailing on the Internet with colleagues from the partner schools, studying basic phrases as well as some folk songs in all partner languages.

Before each stay, a specific preparation or survival guide is given to the students including some basic vocabulary and useful phrases, as well as indications of local traditions and protocol, to enable them to operate in the country they are visiting. Selection of students for the stay takes usually the form of competition for the best and most original presentation or short film related to the topic of stay. The project, however, does not apply only to students who attend a particular mobility. The project offers a variety of activities for students who stay at home, properly motivating them to express their interest in mobility to another country.

Before any mobility, we organize also preparatory meetings with chosen students. During these meetings, we are working with these students on specific vocabulary useful for the research issue, then we are working on overall presentation, correct pronunciation, but also on interactive aspect of presentation. In this way, the cooperation of foreign language teachers of all schools to work out educational materials is inevitable.

Somebody might ask why we teach our students such specific "folklore" vocabulary, which is essential for the implementation of their own research and presenting the results, but not so necessary for their everyday communication. One aspect in favor of our efforts lies in the situation and "genius loci" of our school. It is the region of Liptov with deep-rooted sense of preservation of cultural heritage. This region is also closely related to tourism, which is one of its priority economic sectors. Our students will be able to utilize their acquired knowledge also in this area. During the final meeting of the project partners in Slovakia, the students will be able to experience their guide skills in practice.

The use of foreign languages in the context of a common research topic is a motivating element behind the project. We have already noticed that working together in foreign languages will raise the level of motivation to progress linguistically.

The urge to offer different learning approaches to our students, via concrete experiences on foreign soil helps them to develop their own learning strategies, and overcome the lack of interest displayed in the acquisition of pure knowledge. We hope to encourage the students to think about how and what they learn by immersing them in a real-life experience.



As we have already mentioned our project supports plurilingual principle of language education. All basic documents under which the Slovak language policy is oriented, promote this principle. Plurilingualism takes in European linguistic context privileged status and it is an appropriate response to the promotion and maintenance of European linguistic diversity. In one of the basic documents of the Council of Europe, the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*, the authors state that Europe is not a political entity such as a nation, respectively a state. For a nation or state, it would be sufficient to include one (or more) official national languages to be able to derive a form of unity or identity. Europe represents fundamentally different grouping of nations and can be characterized as pluralistic space with significantly linguistic and cultural diversity. Probably there is no single language that Europeans would qualify for a language peculiar to this area (Beacco & Byram, 2003).

In the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, the term plurilingualism is explained as follows: „the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.” (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001, p. 4)

According to these arguments, for a student there is no longer the norm "native speaker" of a country or a given social category, but the emphasis is put on communication and collaboration among students in the European area. Thus, *plurilingual competence* gets the key position (Hubert, 2009).

4 Conclusion

Unfortunately at this stage of the project implementation we can acquaint the public only with partial results and experience. We tried to offer and discuss the main ideas and visions of our work. We propose a reflection on the first months of the project realization at state grammar school in Ružomberok in cooperation with seven European project partners. Experience and especially satisfaction and educational results of our students (not only of cognitive character) testify that we are going in the right direction. So far we have executed three research and educational mobilities (France, Wales, Hungary). In the near future we plan to implement four other mobilities (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic)



while in Slovakia we will organize the final meeting of all partners, where the project principal results will be presented.

During the implementation of educational tasks, we observe and measure key competences as well as communication in foreign languages, cultural awareness and expression, digital competence, social and civic competences. For this purpose we continuously use measurement tools like questionnaires and tests of language skills, especially for testing participating students in chosen national languages and for measuring the acquisition of cultural and linguistic knowledge. Finally every hosting partner country prepares after each meeting a kind of feedback via newsletters summarizing principal areas of educational activities and established goals. At the end of the project (May 2015), these activities will be evaluated and the results will be interpreted in accordance with the focus and mentioned objectives of the project. We believe that we will have an opportunity to present these results and outcomes within a similar forum.

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