



CO-TEACHING – AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH IN ERASMUS+ TEACHING MOBILITIES

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КООПЕРАТИВНО ПРЕПОДАВАНЕ – ЕФЕКТИВЕН ПОДХОД В ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛСКИТЕ МОБИЛНОСТИ ПО ЕРАЗЪМ+

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Abstract: *The paper addresses co-teaching as an effective approach of teaching in Erasmus+ teaching Mobilities. It outlines the background of this approach and its advantages and challenges in the context of Erasmus+ Teaching Mobilities.*

Key words: *co-teaching, ERASMUS+ Teaching Mobilities, EU education*

Резюме: *Статията разглежда колаборативното преподаване като ефективен преподавателски подход в Еразъм+ преподавателски мобилности. В нея се представя същността на този подход, неговите предимства и недостатъци от гледна точка на преподавателя, на база анализ и изводи направени в рамките на две последователни преподавателски мобилности по програма Еразъм+ от авторите на статията.*

Ключови думи: *колаборативно преподаване, Еразъм+, преподавателски мобилности, образование*

Introduction

Erasmus+ is the major EU Programme that focuses on fields such as education, training, youth and sport. It is open for the period 2014-2020. It is particularly focused on education through which European Union tries to overcome critical socio-economic challenges such as shocking levels of young people unemployment, erosion of educational institutions value, and social detachment amongst various age groups.

These challenges form a negative trend and put young Europeans and European citizens with inadequate professional skills at the risk of long-term unemployment and social marginalization. All this is due to the erosion of the value of education. „Too many young people leave school prematurely running a high risk of being unemployed and socially marginalised. The same risk threatens many adults with low skills.”[1]

Education in all its forms would play a leading role in the prevention and overcoming of highly disturbing socio-economic and cultural issues such as violent radicalization, social disintegration and lack of intercultural empathy, which European countries are faced with. In that case education plays a far larger role and has a much greater importance than

mere knowledge gaining. „The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in close cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society” [2]. Education fulfils all of its purposes by creating information and communication fields where new brave ideas are shared and old stereotypes are broken. These fields become spheres of shared experiences and peer teaching and learning. Thus, an understanding of the culturally, economically, religiously and socially different other emerges. Communities with a sense of belonging are created and productive relationships are established. The incredible advantages of Erasmus+ as a key supranational instrument for promotion of social inclusion and intercultural communication are discussed in details in other papers.

With its main focus on education Erasmus+ gives incredible opportunities to students and academic staff to create and develop their own professional competence, talents and social capital. The Program supports building academic cooperation networks particularly in higher education in order to develop the human capital of Europe. Erasmus+ provides „opportunities for cooperation among stakeholders and the exchange and transfer of knowledge and know-how” [3] as well as good practices. A good proven educational practice is the co-teaching approach, which brings together various academic fields as well diverse personal features of lecturers. Its main purpose is to offer students an exceptional and effective learning experience. The co-teaching approach is highly productive in creating long-term professional relationships and academic involvement.

An Erasmus+ Teaching Mobility (TM) is generally a lonesome endeavor. Visiting lecturers usually carry out their mobilities alone, although this EU Program does not regulate that a mobility has to be done on individual basis. The reasons for this can be found both in the sending higher education institution (HEI) and in the host one. As far as the sending HEI is concerned, the number of ERASMUS+ TM applicants may exceed the allotted funding for the institution. Another reason can be the division of lecturers’ specialties in different faculties. For example, Public Relations is placed either in the field of Humanities or in Business Studies. So, if a lecturer of PR comes from a Business Faculty and wants to team up with a lecturer of Journalism to co-teach, it can become an issue to solve. This is due to the different perspectives (a business perspective and a humanistic perspective) of each lecturer. Of course, the quality of the lecturers’ team relationships is of higher importance in this case. An effective co-teaching team is one whose members have overcome their personal and professional egos. Other reasons can be found in the scheduled teaching in the sending HEI as well as unexpected events.

For the host higher education institution the main challenge is to manage to fit the Erasmus+ teaching mobility lecturers’ classes in their own schedule. Another issue is the level of knowledge of the language of instruction that the lectures have. Inspired by the many advantages and despite the challenges of Erasmus+ Teaching Mobilities the authors of the article managed to do two teaching mobilities in two consecutive years (2015 and 2016) at the Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre (Instituto Politécnico De Portalegre (IPP)), Portugal. They have experimented with implementing co-teaching as the leading teaching approach during the two mobilities with students from the undergraduate programme of Journalism and Communication at the Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre (IPP).

History and definitions of co-teaching

Co-teaching is an idea and method of teaching, which William M. Alexander introduced for the first time more than 50 years ago (in 1963) in the USA. Alexander,



taking into consideration the specific needs of junior age students, proposed the concept of co-teaching whereby a team of three to five teachers would be designated to 75 to 150 students organized on a single-grade or a multi-grade basis (Alexander, 1995).

After Alexander, Bauwens, Hourcade and Friend (1989) coined the term cooperative teaching to describe the joint teaching activities of a general and a special educator within a general education setting for the purpose of meeting the needs of all students including those with special needs. Bacharach, Heck & Dank, define co-teaching as two teachers (teacher candidate and cooperating teacher) working together with groups of students in the same physical space; planning, organizing, instructing, and assessing delivery and learning achievements together (Bacharach, Heck & Dank, 2004).

This understanding of co-teaching ties it to training teacher candidates/pre-service teachers. It is still largely popular as a joint activity in which one of the participants, who is more experienced, better educated and qualified, mentors the other. It is based on the belief that „two is better than one” and that it allows to use the power of two or more teachers in the same classroom.

Cook & Friend (1995) developed seven strategies for practicing teachers to use while guiding and monitoring pre-service teachers. These strategies include:

- One teach, one observe
- One teach, one assist
- Station teaching
- Parallel teaching
- Supplemental teaching
- Alternative or differentiated teaching
- Team teaching

Even though they remain basically the same, these strategies have been adapted by Washut Heck & Bacharach (2010) to meet the concrete needs of prospective teachers. The strategies outline the structure and the procedure of how two teachers should participate in the planning, designing, delivering and evaluating the instruction.

Co-teaching is also known as team teaching and collaborative teaching but a deeper insight into the method and the existing taxonomy reveals significant differentiations between these terms. It is an instructional approach which can be used across subject areas not only in primary and secondary education but also in higher education.

Terminology and taxonomies

One of the taxonomies of team teaching is that of Quinn and Kanter who define team teaching as „simply team work between two qualified instructors, who, together, make presentations to an audience” [4]. This all embracing definition of team teaching or co-teaching best describes the way this approach has been understood by the authors of the present study. Quinn and Kanter divide team teaching into two big categories – Category A and category B. Category A team teaching embraces all situations when two or more teachers teach the same students at the same time in the same physical environment. Category B team teaching comprises the situations when instructors work together but do not necessarily teach the same groups of students at the same time. The authors of this paper do not consider Category B as team teaching, respectively co-teaching. Their main focus of interest is the situation in which two lecturers teach the same group of students at the same time. In this category six models of team teaching have been distinguished by Robinson and Schaibe (1995) and Maroney (1995).

- **Traditional team teaching:** Both teachers contribute actively to the delivery of content and the development of skills in students. One of them may present a new topic while the other develops a mind-map to reinforce learning.

- **Collaborative teaching:** Both teachers work together to plan, design and deliver the material but instead of using the monologue type of instruction, they discuss ideas and theories in front of the students by engaging in productive dialogues.

- **Complimentary/supportive team teaching:** One teacher teaches the content while the other teacher is responsible for providing extra activities and for developing study skills in the students.

- **Parallel instruction:** Teachers divide the class into two groups and each of them is responsible for teaching the same content and skills to his/her group. This type of teaching can be used when students are working on different projects or are involved in problem-solving tasks.

- **Differentiated split class:** This type of teaching is suitable for mixed ability classes. Students are divided into groups according to their current learning needs and each teacher works with one of the groups.

- **Monitoring teacher:** This type of teaching takes place when one of the teachers is responsible for instructing the students while the other takes charge of the students' behavior and understanding and provides support to those who need it.

Research Summary

Objectives: This study aims to 1) explore the nature, advantages and disadvantages of the co-teaching approach 2) study co-teaching as an effective approach of teaching in Erasmus+ Teaching Mobilities context.

Study design and setting: This systematic review of scientific literature draws the picture of the nature, the benefits and challenges of co-teaching since its introduction as a teaching approach. A behaviour coded system was developed. In order to study the effects of co-teaching all lecturers' preparation sessions and the very teaching mobility lectures and seminars were video recorded. The videos were studied against the coded system.

Research methodology: Observation was the used research approach. The research method was a controlled (structured) observation. The research method was chosen because the data obtained is easy and quick to analyze and the research can take place within a tight time frame as the very Erasmus+ teaching mobilities are.

A limitation of the controlled observation method could be the Hawthorne effect in which "research participants may change their behaviour simply because of the attention they receive, regardless of the experimental manipulation." [5]

The sampling includes five 45 minute preparation sessions and four 60 minute lectures and seminars.

Results

Co-teaching is a highly productive teaching approach used in Erasmus+ teaching mobility. The positives for teachers can be:

- CT offers opportunities for mutual support and shared expertise among teachers;
- CT enables sharing of responsibility for instruction and management and lowers stress levels;
- CT turns the teaching experience into a learning experience for the teachers;



- CT helps to overcome academic isolation – teachers get to know each other’s approaches, methods, achievements, and personalities.
- CT enhances both content, pedagogy, collaboration and appreciation of other people’s opinion;
- CT improves the social climate in the classroom by making both teachers and students feel at ease to share and contribute much more than in a classroom dominated by a single teacher;
- CT supports establishing of scholarly networks.

Conclusion

Co-teaching is a method of teaching which enables those practicing it to break out of the traditional single-teacher model and stimulates innovation and experimentation. It allows for diversity in that teachers of different fields of study, experience, values, and mindsets to enrich each other and their students.

From the perspective of Erasmus+ Teaching Mobility co-teaching has impressive benefits both for the professors and for the students. According to the Erasmus Impact for 2014 the three leading benefits for professors are the opportunity to reinforce the collaboration with a partner institution as well as to develop their own competences in their scientific field, and the opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods. We would like to add the opportunity of co-teaching which will have a strong positive effect both on professors and students.

The co-teaching approach in Erasmus+ Teaching Mobility settings offers the opportunity of two teachers from the same higher education institution (HEI) or a lecturer from a visiting and a host institution to share planning, decision making, leadership and trust. Thus Erasmus+ teaching Mobilities become co-teaching Mobilities and set a common ground for different teaching approaches attitudes and collaboration to be practiced. In the case of lecturers from a visiting and a host HEI, co-teaching can motivate improvement and innovation in both HEIs “through a change of the mindset, or it can have an impact on the quality of education provided by these institutions, e.g. by new curricula or different teaching methods, which then in turn have an effect again on the internationalization of such HEIs” [6]. Co-teaching has the potential to drive this transformation because in the case of higher education institutions, co-teaching is based on collaborative cooperation. It is “a partnership between professional peers with different types of expertise.” [7] A key prerequisite is the building of mutually beneficial relationships (a professional union) between the lecturers.

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