

THE OPTIMIZATION OF THE COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE OF THE STUDENTS THROUGH THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE EDUCATION

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Advances in the understanding of education are introduced in a far less straightforward way into the classroom than, say, advances in medical knowledge are applied in the doctor's surgery. The difference arises partly because there is no educational equivalent of penicillin – an easily administered new remedy that will make a clear and immediate difference to performance. It is also because educational reform can be made to work only by teachers, who have to take on board the spirit of any change *en masse*. But teachers are, as we all know, extremely conservative in their classroom practice. Those changes they usually accept are more a matter of a response to contemporary fashion – expressed through political and administrative initiatives – than a direct result of solid research on what works and what doesn't. We, those who teach, are the first part of the chain; we are supposed to learn to use the evidence of what works in education more effectively. There are good reasons to do so, one of them being the permanent pressure on education to raise its performance in the given social and economical context of such countries as Romania today. We all, – active parts in teaching or just consumers of education, – believe that education is more important than ever before, and yet too many children and students leave school/academy with inadequate skills. The divergence between opinion and fact has caused some people to ask whether education is far too conservative in terms of *modus operandi*. Will the age-old model of a teacher standing in front of a class of 30 students serve for the 21 century? The potential for a radical departure from such long-established practice is bigger

now than ever. And ideas about restructuring education can be linked to the power of new information technology as a means of tailoring learning to the requirements of each individual student. In the "classroom" of the future, in which we all already work and live, teacher must have, except his academic background, strong knowledge about cultural and economical education, about the real quantitative indicators of educational performance. Learning must be structured more flexibly over the school day or week, with students taking more responsibility for allocating time to meet their own program rather than fitting into a rigid timetable. The important changes in education are, from this point of view, in its content: that is, rather than being narrowly focused on abstract academic subjects, it has to bring a wide variety of applied and vocational studies, at least as options. The quality of education is more important than its quantity. We are aware of the fact that this is not pure theory. It is our target, as well, – as foreign languages teachers at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, – to help bridge the gap between theory and practice, in order to optimize our performance, that of translating knowledge about education into real improvement. The school we need must have more permeable walls, so that both young people and adults can move free in and out of it. The educational and career guidance are to fulfill their potential in easing transitions between different tiers of education, or between education and work, – transitions that in the recent past happened more or less automatically, as young people moved *en masse* from one system to another. Thus, they are to improve

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the labor market and to help individuals to get most of their lives; this is why we have to adapt our professional behavior to the rapidly changing market. The modeling of the positive behavior and innovative thinking must start with us, their teachers. We are supposed to be able to prepare students think critically, communicate effectively, value teamwork and use information technology appropriate to meet organizational goals. No matter our discipline, we are to foster in students a desire for social and ethical responsibilities, appreciation of cultural diversity, and a sense of value and purpose. These are, for sure, common targets nowadays, which make us speak about the *internationalization of higher education*.

The international dimension of higher education is now given more prominence than in previous decades for reasons both external and internal. External considerations include changes in the labor market, which call for different kinds of skills and knowledge, not least the deeper understanding of the languages, cultures and business methods found elsewhere in the world. Recent case studies of US-based international enterprises suggest that employers do see the recent emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity in college and academic curricula as an important preparation for work in an economy without borders. No doubt that higher education is playing a part in the policy objectives of our governments; many of the objectives concerning the domestic economic development have now a strong international emphasis. This is why, in order to promote mobility and exchange inside given regions, rather than in broadly "global" context, and to improve comparability in the contents and methods of study programmes there have been created such obvious examples of cooperation as the "Erasmus", "Tempus" or "Comett" programmes for the EU.

From within, there has been a reassertion of the "traditional" view of higher education. First, there is the long-standing interest in establishing and maintaining an environment of discovery and advanced learning in which the scope of knowledge is continuously expanded through exchange among students and teachers around the world. Many of our students have had the opportunity of studying, for a certain period of time, in France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Sweden and other countries. A special mention should be made by us concerning the very good relations we have with the State Institute for Russian Language "A.S.Pushkin" from Moscow that has offered us every year during the past five years the possibility for 30 of the students of the International Faculty of our academy to be on 3 months courses of improving their knowledge of Business Russian. That means that 150 of our students have already attended

these courses. These programmes include also us, teachers, as we also active parts of this process.

The key word encompassing new ideas seems to be "internationalization". This means, for example, that the institutions of the same type of higher education (economic, in our case) may develop in many respects the same type of education. It is far beyond specialized international programmes and student exchanges, which were the hallmarks of the past decade for our countries. The content of "internationalization" has to move into the main stream of the curriculum and administrative structure. That means that the concept should be widened to include, in addition to student mobility, also curriculum and staff development and mobility. This may refer, for example, to the academic content and processes, where education is sometimes provided by foreign academics, as it happens with a number of subjects in our Academy of Economic Studies, including foreign languages (English and French, and, we hope, Russian, in the near future). This is likely to have a more structural and longer-term impact on the institution itself, whereas the effects of mere mobility and exchange are limited to the individual students. The international dimension is thus no longer a marginal concern affecting only a little part of students; thus it gains a more central place in the main stream of educational planning and management.

Internationalized curricula may be defined as those with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic and foreign students. From this point of view we can identify an increasing range of activities aimed at the target of preparing internationally trained professionals, who are able to address cross-border and global problems from an international and interdisciplinary perspective and to work with people from different national and cultural backgrounds. From a more pragmatic point of view, the decision to reform the curriculum has at least two advantages. It provides international educational opportunities for domestic students who don't have the chance to go on scholarship abroad. And it also increases the attractiveness of the curriculum for foreign students, whose presence is generally benefic to domestic students and to the education process as a whole. In many cases the argument for new initiatives refers to improvement of the quality of higher education, with benefits in student motivation and learning, through increased understanding of the international aspects of the subjects, foreign language competence and intercultural communication skills.