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Co-teaching citizenship within the process of European integration: the Romanian Experiences of formal and non-formal education

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Abstract

The paper investigates the way in which Non-Higher Education Organisations have become active partners of Higher Education Institutions in educating young people to become citizens of Europe, aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities. The experiment presented here, The Students' Euro Parliament, is part of a dissemination activity of a project initiated by a Non-Higher Education Organisation to enhance teenagers and young people's abilities and competences with social and political contexts and to turn them into responsible individual of the society. The Romanian experience points to the fact that there is a good level of readiness for the country's integration at least at the level of the young generation.

Introduction

Romania's real integration into the European Union can be achieved by juxtaposing political programmes with educational activities, at the level of both institutional and organisational cooperation, in order to reinforce the change within the people's way of thinking, through activities - in formal and non-formal structures – that focus on values, attitudes and options concerning the present state of society.

Education is the only way to provide people with knowledge, skills and abilities to communicate against a background of changes and reconfigurations in terms of values, history, and diversity, while praising unity and preserving one's identity. Within this new context of permanent reshaping, the theoretical contributions coming from the CiCe thematic network proved useful in our country in the years of accession to the European Union, as an input into the work of educators in universities, first of all, by helping them increase awareness of the issues of citizenship and identity in Europe (the series *European Issues in Children's Identity and Citizenship* (Trentham Books), and the CiCe Guidelines). (Nasman, E., and Ross, A. Eds. 2002. Roland-Levi, C., and Ross, A. (Eds.) (2003). Fulop, M. and Ross, A. Eds, 2005. Papoulia-Tzelepi, P., Hegstrup, P., and Ross, A. 2005)

Before Romania's accession to the European Union, young people's social representation about being part of a larger union can be described as being mainly issues of:

- Individual rights – work, travelling, meeting other people, inhabiting any space for liberties, equality of opportunities, social justice, freedom of speech, education
- Individual (and group) duties and responsibilities – respecting laws, environmental concern, tolerance, mutual cooperation, acceptance, permissiveness, compulsion within a European context (Filimon, Danciu, 2006)

Between 1990 and 2006 we note a gradual intensification of two phenomena:

- An increasing interest for about learning human rights and acquiring social skills in hidden curricula (literature, history, geography, arts and skills),
- The apparition and increasing activities of NGOs within the context of post-communist uncertainty and lack of democratic experience and practice (e.g. Pro Democracy, the Young Forum for European Integration, foundations for youth, children, students, associations for human rights, or, in 2005, the European year of Citizenship through education, the publication of the translation of E. Huddleston's book for training teachers for democratic citizenship and human rights education, etc.) (E. Huddleston, 2005).

The process of European integration from the perspective of citizenship education, social skills practice, and identity awareness implied a wide range of activities included in experiments, projects and programmes, originally initiated by European foundations (e.g. the agenda of APADOR-CH, the Romanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the Atlantic project for Education to Human Rights in the age of globalisation, a Comenius action), continued by partnerships of European and Romanian institutions - e.g. the British Council and Romanian universities' common project *Perceptions and Opinions of Students of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj on the European Union and Romania's Accession to the EU* (Miscoin, 2007) or the British Council's sites for youth issues, the American Embassy and youth associations – the project *Youth for Democracy: What Does It Take to Be an Active Citizen* (www.alsdgc.ro), and ended in independent projects or programmes - the experiment of the Association for Promoting Cooperation in Education (Popa, Danciu, Filimon, Laurian, Stoian, 2007), or the current project of the Students' Europarliament carried out by the University of Oradea and the City Council (www.oradea.ro).

The transformations observed in the way that Romanians teach and acquire social skills and behaviours are caused by various social needs:

- To grant democratic access to its members,
- To develop their critical thinking,
- To be aware of the their needs and ambitions,
- To encourage equal opportunities,
- To praise local, regional, national values and traditions as part of life challenges.

Objectives

The present research was carried out in order to show the current dimensions of citizenship education and social skills acquisition, as a result of the joint action of HE and NHE, both of whom aim at:

- Identification of experiences regarding citizenship skills acquisition through projects and programmes initiated in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and community institutions,
- Presenting the good practice in its process of dissemination of project and programmes' sustainability and implementation among educational institutions, young people's organisations and the local community,
- Description of the experiment being carried out at the University of Oradea as an example of fruitful cooperation between high education institutions and the local community.

Hypotheses

1. formal and non-formal activities, started before Romania's integration, have contributed to educating and then extending knowledge about citizenship in the home country and Europe at all levels of schooling,
2. the dissemination and implementation of the good practice has been achieved through publications, conferences, seminars, workshops organised in educational institutions locally, regionally, nationally,
3. the Students' Europarliament is an example of the way in which institutional and community factors can provide a background favouring educating, training and practising citizenship skills in real life context.

Sample

Participants	Stage of research	Number
Project coordinators, NGO's representatives	Prerequisite	15
Students of the University of Oradea	Pre-experimental	182
Students of the University of Oradea	Experimental	72 (36 experimental group) (36 control group)

- Students of the University of Oradea are drawn from different faculties,
- Project coordinators of citizenship education from nine formal and six non-formal regional educational institutions.

Methods

- **Semi-structured interviews** used to identify the students' problems in terms of rights, responsibilities in the academic life of Oradea, as well as the ways of improving the students' participation to problem resolution as compared to the students' status in other European countries
- **Questionnaire**
- **Document analysis**: examination of NGO statutes, project content, programme content, conference proceedings
- **Case study**
- **Experiment**

Procedure

a. **Data collecting** by interview and document analysis: in the prerequisite stage the project coordinators were interviewed to find out the project theme, authors, finances, objectives, brief description of projects, subjects/ beneficiaries, institutions involved, results/ implementation.
b. **Initiation of the project of the Students' Europarliament** in cooperation with the agency for youth development of the city council of Oradea (www.oradea.ro)
c. **The development of the project (The Students' Europaliament)**:

Step 1: selection and distribution of students by **simple randomisation**, i.e. four students from each faculty were selected and then distributed in either a control or an experimental group;

Step 2: identification of students' problems in terms of their rights, responsibilities, duties, by discussions and **semi-structured interviews.**
- Debates and solution search/finding for each faculty at the competence of each work group; database building,
- Debates and resolutions for problems within the plenary session of the Europarliament based on hierarchisation, prioritisation, and cost-effectiveness,
- Issue and publication of synoptic documents (booklets designed by the students of the Computer Sciences Faculty).

Step 3: testing subjects:
- The experimental group
- The control group
  Step 4: result analysis and dissemination

Results

a. An intensification of the process of cooperation/co-teaching between formal and non-formal institutions in a common attempt to provide the young generation with the knowledge about citizenship, civic behaviour and social skills practice is undoubtedly graspable in Romanian society nowadays, especially if one examines documents regarding the involvement of teachers, schools, associations, foundations, national and local factors in organising and carrying out projects and activities of the kind. In Bihor county, for instance, out of the 87 registered foundations, 21 are oriented towards human

rights and citizenship competences practice; consequently, the documents we analysed point to the fact that in 2006, as a year of reference, teachers and students in Bihor county were involved in the following categories of civic education projects:

- Education for democracy and human rights,
- Cultural and intercultural issues,
- Civic education in schools,
- Individual and community development,
- Environmental education.
  (www.isj.bh.edu.ro)

They were carried out at local, regional, and national level in partnership with NHE institutions as can be noted in a list of some of the most relevant projects:

- *Children's Rights*, a project devised by the Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, in cooperation with schools in Oradea, targeted at pupils of all age;
- *The Citizen*, a project specifically focused on civic education among teenagers, authored by The Intercultural Institute of Timisoara and schools from the western region of Romania;
- *Civic Education*, a project of the Ady Endre high school in Oradea and the Csiki foundation aimed at developing the sense of diversity and multiculturalism awareness;
- *Spring Day*, a project initiated by ECOTOP Association and schools in Oradea, aimed at providing environmental education and developing civic responsibilities and duties among the young generation;
- *Professional Success. Being a leader,* a common project of high schools in Oradea and the Junior Achievement Organisation aimed at developing social skills, bevaviour and attitudes.

The document examination pinpoints a serious participation of both teachers and students in **conferences** (e.g. the teachers' regional conference for civic education in the national curriculum partnered by the Association for Civic Education, the Ministry of Education, the Teachers' local societies, the American Institute for training and Development; the students' seminar *Romania's Children Today - Europe's Citizens Tomorrow*), in **workshops** (The civic education programme about granting human rights as a chance for Romania's European integration), and **summer schools** (*Learning by working for the community* as part of the national project for training teachers for civic education, partnered by the Ministry of education and the American Institute for Training and Development).

b. Case studies
The cases presented here are significant as examples of cooperation work between educational units and NGOs, recently developed in common agendas prior to European integration, emerging from the need to train young people for their future stage identity. These projects were carried out in different parts of the country (Cluj, Timisoara,

Bucharest, Oradea), with both national and foreign NGOs and we had their approval to share the results of their work in our paper.

***The Adolescents' Parliament* carried out in Cluj (www.alsdgc.ro., <u>www.edrc.ro</u>)**

Project partners: The Association for Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (ARWCT) and the Resource Centre for Ethno cultural Diversity (RCED) with a PHARE support

Objectives:
1. Promotion of democratic values and social justice in the context of issues in Romanian society;
2. Developing adolescents' skills to practise civic rights and responsibilities within their institutions and within networks of high schools and politicians, to share and disseminate good practice.

Brief description: The project focuses on identifying and practicing democratic values and social justice issues within a context of active citizenship developed at the level of teenagers; its activities contribute to the consolidation of democracy, rule of law and human rights among the teenagers; it is completed throughout a number of activities including:
- The setting up of the Adolescents' Parliament,
- Familiarisation with the legal system,
- Human rights acquisition and practice,
- Organisation of local campaigns and a Parliament session,
- Publication of the Adolescents' Official Monitor, distributed to schools and youth institutions in several counties of Romania.

Implementation:
- School and community activities practicing democratic skills,
- Improvement of school environment and teacher-student relationship,
- Effectiveness of proactive exercise in long-term options (career, profession, community life),
- Promoting civic proactivism among youth, complementing the school's educational offer through extracurricular activities,
- Challenging other students to participate and contribute to young people's individual and professional development through projects and programmes of active involvement in society,
- Organising six local campaigns on specific topics: corruption; minority rights; liberty of the press; European integration; civic vote and responsibility; gender equality,
- Holding a seven-day Parliament session,
- Issuing a set of measures for enhancing civic activism,
- Publication of the Adolescents' Official Gazette,
- Carrying out six campaigns of information and dissemination of good practice in the partnering schools,

- Building a resource network of schools to contribute in the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of teenagers.

Youth for Democracy: What does it take to be an active citizen? (**Timisoara**)

Project partners: the Association for Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (ARWCT) and the Centre for Consultancy and Education for Young People (CCEYP) (www.alsdgc.ro).

Objectives:
1. Developing active citizenship skills with young people - resolution of community problems, decision making about human rights promotion, awareness of diversity and community life in schools;
2. Developing abilities to identify problems related to human rights promotion in the community and to work as a team in resolving potential controversies.

Brief description: this is a national project oriented towards:
- The developing of young people's active citizenship competences;
- Young people's training as decision factors in human rights promotion; - raising young people's awareness of societal diversity and multiculturalism;
- Identifying and coping with possible controversial issues regarding human rights in schools;
- Developing team work spirit and knowledge of furthering projects related to community issues;
- Developing a critical thinking in dealing with community problems and their resolution.

Implementation:
- A barometer for human rights promotion in participating schools, followed by a questionnaire to 1000 pupils; results posted on the project website;
- Training 75 pupils in human rights promotion, project devising, communication and teambuilding;
- Elaboration of students' projects, attended by teachers and trainers;
- Sustainability granted by other pupils, parents, NGOs information upon the benefits and the results of the project;
- A web page of the project
- A booklet of guidelines for lesson planning and promoting critical thinking and human rights to be delivered in high schools in the country.

RE-ETGACE Project, 'Reviewing Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe – A Central and Eastern European Perspective', a complementary measure to the original ETGACE Project, Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe' (Bucharest, Oradea) (Dodescu, Hatos, 2004)

Project partners: Hungarian and Romanian foundations and NGOs (e.g. Hungarian Foundation for Self-Reliance; Civil Society Development Foundation Hungary; European House Budapest the Non-Profit Information and training Centre Foundation; EU-CIPP; Hungarian Non-Profit sector; Open Society Foundation Romania; Civil

Society Development Foundation; Romanian Development Gateway; Carpathian Foundation – Fund for Development of the Carpathian; Euro region Romania; NGO Forum-Romania; Non-Governmental Organisations – Romania On-line; Euro regional Centre for democracy; NGO Advising Centre.

Objectives:
1. Conceptualisation of citizenship, active citizenship and governance and their turning into active practice in the two countries in the aftermath of communist regime;
2. Devising learning strategies for education and training for active citizenship and governance.

Brief description:
- A focus on aspects of educating and training for governance and citizenship in two East-European countries recently engaged in the process of democratisation,
- Investigation of better learning of active citizenship at an institutional level,
- Strategies to involve and encourage people towards social activism and governance from an educational perspective.

Implementation:
- Linking formal overall policies with active citizenship;
- Presentation and assessment of the two countries' conditions for practicing active citizenship and governance within the process of transition from communism to democracy;
- Transformation of the learning process into a transitional experience and a process of socialisation;
- Examination of potential/challenges versus limitations/hindrances of active citizenship;
- Employment of intervention strategies for education and training for active citizenship and governance;
- Publication of the results of the project both in a hard and an electronic version.

ATLANTE Project, education to human rights in the age of globalisation **(Gansca, Ciobanu, 2004)**

Project partners: primary, secondary, high schools and universities from six European countries, and European and national institutions related to human rights promotion.

Objectives:
- To ensure the understanding of the importance of human rights and inter-ethnic cooperation in contemporary Europe;
- To increase awareness of the need for a specific education in the globalised age of immigration.

Brief description: The project is thematically oriented to problems of major interests in an age of globalisation, supranational connection and communication which is the effect caused by migration: it attempts:
- To provide education to human rights starting from an early age;

- To work with differences within the context of human rights promotion and interethnic cooperation;
- To provide the premises of the development of peaceful and open attitudes among children and young people;
- To understand the strong relationship between education, human rights and social justice;
- To map the documents of the European institutions which refer to peace, human rights and development, in terms of theory and practice.

Implementation:
- Changes in approaching the problem of human rights in cross-curricular and methodological aspects;
- Elaboration of new teaching/learning methods to include issues of human rights in order to prevent discrimination and intolerance;
- Developing a critical thinking in dealing with difference;
- Building a microcosm in which conflict is seen as a working resource, that can be corrected and explained;
- Creating a working methodology for teachers for topics related to human rights;
- Conceiving a European interdisciplinary curriculum in the area of education for human rights;
- Supplying teachers with teaching materials from partners;
- Creating a database of bibliography and practical activities to be used in seminars and workshops;
- Conceiving the new curriculum and the final CD which s supposed to be a real guide of good practice in teaching human rights.

c. Experiment: Students' Europarliament (www.oradea.ro)

This project emerged from the supposition that Romanian students usually are not aware of their rights, responsibilities and duties, as later demonstrated by the answers recorded in the interview devised by the authors of the paper and a group of students from the faculties of humanities, the latter being the operators; according to the answers they got from 182 students we could observe that 36% of the students have no, or only vague knowledge of their rights, whereas 88.5% of them do know of their academic duties consisting of:
- Attending courses,
- Sitting for their examination,
- Paying taxes,
- Commitment in carrying out their tasks.

The semi-structured interviews point to the fact that Romanian students show an interest in European students' academic environment as 70% of them have quite a good knowledge of it in terms of:
- Facilitated access information,
- A wider range of electives,
- The dominance of practice skill formation in the curricula,
- A more informal and interactive relationship between teachers and students,
- More financial aid,
- Better social integration of graduates.

The students' answers reveal that they do not know whether and how their rights are respected, as included in statutes, a possible explanation being either their ignorance of the statute (36.6%), of its inefficiency (33.51%), or uncertain answers (21.3%) about both the document and its use.

When it is about the representation in terms of their rights, 54.9% are not pleased with their organisational representation as being inefficient and inoperative, but suggest no solution as an alternative.

The results of this survey justify the initiation of the project of Students' Europarliament meant to provide a realistic representation of the function and effectiveness of such an institution at the scale of the university and to demonstrate the use of democratic practices.

Aim: developing active and responsible involvement of students in the academic life at the University of Oradea;
- Acquiring citizenship competencies and developing social skills;
- Increasing students' awareness of the importance and role they have in the country's social life.

Target group: the students of the University of Oradea

Direct beneficiaries: 36 students (2 from each faculty) of the 2nd and 3rd year of study as the experimental group, plus 36 from the control group

Indirect beneficiaries:
- All the students of the University of Oradea (more than 15,000),
- The teaching staff of the University of Oradea,
- The local community.

Objectives:
a. General objectives:
1. Developing and practising civic behaviour in the academic environment,
2. Promoting democratic/European values and attitudes,
3. Increasing students' awareness of and responsibility to issues related to academic life.
b. Specific objectives:
1. Creating a network for the cooperation of students and teaching staff for all 18 faculties;
2. Identifying students' problems and offering suggestions for their possible resolution;
3. Developing a democratic background and environment while (and after) completing project activities;
4. Creating a database to include information and details, controversial issues and peculiarities related to the development of the project;
5. Disseminating the project by booklet publication (by and for the students);

6. Making students aware of their role and importance in solving problems by including them in activities and fields of academic life.

The project lasts for six months, from May to November 2007. Its impact will be described at a future conference and will be published within the process of dissemination.

Comments

The project started and has developed so far as follows:

Stage 1: students had an opening meeting (April 10 2007) to inform:
- Project particularities and development,
- Methods,
- Individual responsibilities,
- Expected results.

In the next two weeks, they identified their peers' problems by talking to them (individually or in groups), by asking some of them to answer the semi-structured interviews, by contacting group leaders to discover specific aspects of students' present problems concerning their area of studies, as mentioned before. Then the members of the Europarliament listed those problems, categorised them, and processed the information:
- Administrative issues related to the secretarial offices, such as registration failures, tax payment difficulties, document processing delay;
- Communication issues resulting in inefficient practices such as examination scheduling, grades, timetable, scholarships, projects, camps announcements;
- First-year students' ignorance about university professional and administrative staff and functions, access to the university facilities, distribution, location and role of teaching and administration personnel, information related to academic rights and duties;
- Scarcity of elective courses which means a diminished right to complete one's personal interest or a research activity during their academic years;
- Discrepancies in students' assessment systems in terms of task scoring and evaluation and their restricted access to sharing them;
- Limited possibilities of information in the resource centres of the university (the university library, the department resource centres), consequently a limited right to information;
- Low academic motivation due to students' lack of involvement in academic tasks, activities, and research work.

There have been several suggestions for changing the present situation:
- Helping the university with building a site to cover the information gap of administrative nature;
- Publishing newsletters to post students with the latest development in their academic life;
- Editing brochures to promote each faculty's fields of study and organising special days for the presentations of the faculties/university;

- Selecting volunteers among the 2nd and 3rd year students to tutor the 1st year students during their period of adjustment;
- Using questionnaires to sense students' problems and have a permanent feedback on the way academic life is seen from the perspective of students' rights and responsibilities/duties.

Stage 2: Students from all the faculties will be invited to attend a plenary meeting (in June) where the members of the Europarliament report on their activities carried out until then.

Stage 3: The Europarliament will publish brochures containing students' rights and duties related to their academic life. The content will follow the needs and observations and will try to fill in the gaps in the field based on the facts discovered at the University of Oradea (July-October).

Stage 4: Dissemination of results consisting of:

- General presentation of the project in the media;
- Distribution of brochures among the students of the university;
- Informing the Faculty Councils upon the results of the project;
- Reporting the results of the project in the University Senate;
- Posting the materials and the findings on the University website (November and after).
- Testing experimental and control samples
- Final analysis and conclusions

We think that this project can make students get involved and show responsibility in the affairs of the academic community in Oradea, that they can become an example of students' active European integration, that they are ready to participate to the intercultural cooperation in Europe, that they have initiative and are creative in promoting youth rights and duties to grant good citizens here and everywhere.

Conclusions

Our study highlighted cooperation between educational institutions on the one hand, and associations and foundations on the other, works within the larger efforts to educate citizenship in the new situation of Romania's being a member of the EU.

It also follows the opening stages of the development of a project in process, carried out in the University of Oradea as an exercise for practicing social skills and civic behaviour within an academic environment in the context of Romanian young people's sharing of European democratic values and participating in the new stage in the development of the Union - a request of the present situation of the country in which awareness about rights, responsibilities, and duties of both Romanian and European citizenship has become reality.

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