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SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES Creativity and togetherness through the Erasmus+ Exchange

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Abstract – Team building games and contact teaching: Using creativity within Erasmus+ teacher exchange programs. Students are international and the course is called: Development of Social and Managerial Potential

A partnership between Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Škoda Auto University (Czech Republic) where students learn through traditional teaching and then through games played in teams outside in the Czech countryside.

A teacher from each university and a group of international students studying in the Czech Republic spend a weekend in a small country hotel near Mladá Boleslav, Czech Republic. The hotel is situated in a small village, in the quiet countryside, surrounded by rolling hills. The host teacher starts the course in the traditional way at the university. About a quarter of the way through the course, the teacher from Finland arrives and everybody meets at the hotel. Two intensive days of teaching and team-building games follow. Students take part in traditional teaching and have teamwork exercises within the unique hotel setting. Students then complete team-building games outside on the hotel grounds.

At the hotel, issues related to culture, management, gender roles and teams are discussed, explored and reflected upon. Furthermore, socialisation is part of the program. Teachers and students meet for common meals to discuss the activities, course and content. It is also an informal time for questions and feedback. The evening after dinner is free for the students and the following day's program starts again at 8:00 am. The setting of the hotel in the countryside also plays a role in creating a learning atmosphere that is far removed from the more traditional model. The host teacher continues the course back at the university.

Keywords: Erasmus+, Creativity, Teambuilding

This project was not based on any research model. The project was developed through the Erasmus+ program and further revised based on student feedback. Team building games, traditional teaching and a unique learning environment are the focus on the creative learning environment. Kolb's Learning Cycle will be used to show a correlation between educational theory and the project.

Erasmus+ Programme

The background of how the project started is based in the Erasmus+ Programme and the section that allows for teacher mobility. Through the programme, the possibilities are set to develop your teaching and gain cross-cultural experience. The Erasmus+ programme is vast and covers many

aspects of teaching. For this paper, the focus is on teacher mobility and the freedom to be creative. The partnership between universities is linked through the Erasmus+ programme.

The Erasmus Programme is a programme that assists co-operation between educational institutions within the EU. The Erasmus Programme started in the 1980s. (Erasmus Programme, [ref. 3 January 2018])

Many of the students, which take part in the course offered, are students of the Erasmus Programme.

Erasmus+ expands the opportunities and scope of the original programme. Teacher exchange is also possible under the programme. (European Commission, [ref. 3 January 2018] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/staff-teaching\_en)

Both of the universities, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Škoda Auto University (Czech Republic) are members of the Erasmus+ Programme. Furthermore, they are partner universities with a long history of working together.

## Course Set-Up

The universities involved in this project are Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Škoda Auto University (Czech Republic). Students are international and the class composition changes year by year. As of 2017, this learning project has been offered four times and is still ongoing with plans to continue in 2018 and beyond. The learning methods are varied. Traditional teaching is used in classrooms and at the university. This is followed by the learning environment changing to a hotel in the Czech countryside for more non-traditional teaching methods, such as team building games played in teams outside in the Czech countryside. The students then complete the course in the traditional way back at the university.

This paper will focus on the teaching and learning environment away from the university. It is here where the untraditional and creativity in learning takes place. The course is held in the Czech Republic. The home university is located in Mladá Boleslav, the Czech Republic and the university is Škoda Auto University. The course starts at the university and is taught in what is now considered the traditional way in a classroom. Roughly a quarter of the way into the course a change occurs. The guest teacher arrives from Finland the Erasmus+ programme. The learning environment transitions to a hotel situated in a small village, in the quiet countryside, surrounded by rolling hills. Two intensive days of teaching and team-building games follow. The teaching hours over these two days is roughly 12 hours. Students take part in traditional teaching and have teamwork exercises within the unique hotel setting. Students then complete team-building games outside on the hotel grounds. The time spent at the hotel is Friday to Saturday. The guest teacher from Finland is largely responsible for teaching during this period. After the time at the hotel, the host teacher continues the course back at the university. The guest teacher leaves having completed their obligations of the Erasmus+ programme.

Course content includes culture, management, gender roles and teams. These topics and concepts are explored and reflected upon before and after the team building games are played. In addition, socialisation between students and teachers is part of the program. Teachers and students meet for common meals to discuss the activities, course and content. It is also an informal time for questions and feedback. The evening after dinner is free for the students and the following day's program starts again at 8:00 am. The setting of the hotel in the countryside also plays a role in creating a learning atmosphere that is far removed from the more traditional model.

In the classroom, no technology is used. Meaning that no PowerPoints or computers are used. This is what is now considered non-traditional teaching. The aim is to have a group of international students to interact and take an active role in their learning. They should also apply the knowledge they gained during the lessons before coming to the hotel. The classroom is located on the top floor of the hotel. It is an empty room with a flipchart, chairs and desks. Chairs are placed in a circle to increase interaction. Since students are already familiar with each other, it is easy to start. A few minutes are used to get used to the surroundings and how the course will continue. Learning exercises related to culture and management are introduced. Students work in cross-cultural groups on the tasks. Time for reflection and discussion are used. Classes end at dinnertime.

Meal Times and Informal Discussions

Students and teachers meet for dinner at the hotel restaurant. Here it is a more informal setting and students are free to discuss the course and how it will proceed. After dinner, the students have free time.

Breakfast is served at 8:00 am and students are expected to arrive on time. During breakfast, the day's program is discussed and any other issues brought up by the students. These informal gatherings help create a relaxed atmosphere and generate positive feedback from the students. Students say that they are more open to discuss issues and ask questions away from the classroom.

Potential Criticisms

There can be expected objections to a learning method conducted in this fashion. This teaching approach corresponds to Kolb's learning cycle, which represents a general framework for teaching and learning. Below Kolb's learning Cycle framework will be applied to the teaching methods and activities used during the intensive part of the course, which is the focus of this paper.

Kolb's Learning Cycle

Kolb's Learning Cycle is based on that learning must take place with the experience. Experience is what is offered to the students in regards to the team building games and the debriefing, which takes place afterwards. Kolb's Learning Cycle will be presented below along with how it links together to the work that the students are doing.

Kolb's Learning Cycle

Concrete Experience – a new experience or situation is encountered

Reflective Observation of the new experience – reflection between the experience and understanding

Abstract Conceptualization – a new idea or modification comes from the reflection

Active Experimentation – the student applies what they have learned and studies the results

(Simply Psychology [ref. 4 January 2018] https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html)

The application of Kolb's Learning Cycle

Concrete Experience – students are removed from their familiar learning environment and usual teaching methods. They play team-building games that require being creative, team orientated and leadership roles.

Reflective Observation of the new experience – during the closing moments of the time at the hotel students reflect on the activities and the entire experience. This includes the teaching aspects, socialization and team-building games.

Abstract Conceptualization – Students then work individually and write down any new ideas or modifications of existing ideas. Then they work in small groups and discuss their ideas with others. Finally, they have a class discussion about their ideas and experiences.

Active Experimentation – For this point, this point students will take the skills they have acquired and apply it in their future.

## Student Feedback

Feedback has been mostly positive. Some comments from the students are listed below:

Does not feel like school.

Feels like a managerial retreat

Environment plays a role in learning.

No technology is good.

Appreciate the social aspects

Costs incurred

To sum up the feedback comments, it appears that students appreciate the new learning environment and enjoy being away from school. The set-up creates a different learning environment that the students react positively with and in an enthusiastic way.

On the negative side is that the students incur some costs. The costs are minimum and the students do have the option to return to their homes and not stay at the hotel. Nevertheless, the students must return for 8:00 am the next morning.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, having the learning experience removed from the university setting and bringing in the concept of games creates a more relaxed and unique experience for all those involved. Student feedback has been positive in regards to the setup and the learning methods. Applying outcomes from the games, such as material failure instead of a working process have been interesting for both the students and teachers. Other interesting outcomes have been the issues of gender roles amongst cultures, leadership roles and communication patterns.

In closing, students have enjoyed this style of learning. They have enjoyed being removed from the university. Even though some parts can seem abstract, the time for reflection and debriefing links together the activities with the learning outcomes.

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