

Erasmus Εντατικά Προγράμματα: Έλεγχος ενός καινοτόμου εκπαιδευτικού εργαλείου

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ιστορικό: Ένα Εντατικό Πρόγραμμα Erasmus (ΕΠΕ) είναι ένα σύντομο πρόγραμμα σπουδών διάρκειας 2-6 εβδομάδων. Οι στόχοι του είναι να προετοιμάσει, να διενεργήσει και να αξιολογήσει ένα καινοτόμο εκπαιδευτικό αντικείμενο το οποίο δεν αποτελεί μέρος του καθιερωμένου προγράμματος σπουδών.

Σκοπός: του άρθρου να παρέχει μια επισκόπηση των οκτώ ΕΠΕ στα οποία συμμετείχε το τμήμα νοσηλευτικής του Α.Τ.Ε.Ι.Θ. και της συνεισφοράς τους στη συνεχιζόμενη νοσηλευτική εκπαίδευση

Μέθοδος: Η μελέτη περίπτωσης χρησιμοποιήθηκε σε αυτό το άρθρο συζήτησης προκειμένου να αναλυθούν κριτικά τα ΕΠΕ.

Αποτελέσματα: Ένα ΕΠΕ ως συνοπτικό εκπαιδευτικό 'εργαλείο' μπορεί να αναλυθεί στα εξής κρίσιμα συστατικά: ομάδες στόχοι, κύριες εκπαιδευτικές δραστηριότητες, μαθησιακά αποτελέσματα, αναμενόμενα αποτελέσματα, εκπαιδευτικοί στόχοι, κύριες δραστηριότητες, αποτελέσματα, πρόοδο της προετοιμασίας, καινοτόμες πτυχές και τελικά μαθησιακά αποτελέσματα. Έτσι, τα 10 κρίσιμα συστατικά ενός ΕΠΕ θα παρουσιαστούν και θα συζητηθούν περαιτέρω.

Συζήτηση: Τα ΕΠΕ δίνουν έμφαση σε ευρύτερες μορφές γνώσης (π.χ. πολιτιστική) και όχι μόνο στη στενή αντίληψη της γνώσης που αναμένεται να αποκτούν οι σπουδαστές και η οποία προκύπτει από τις πιο παραδοσιακές εκπαιδευτικές μεθόδους. Επίσης, διευκολύνουν τόσο τους φοιτητές όσο και τους εκπαιδευτικούς να εργαστούν από κοινού σε διαπολιτισμικές και πολυεθνικές ομάδες, προκειμένου να επωφεληθούν από τις ειδικές μαθησιακές και διδακτικές συνθήκες οι οποίες δεν είναι διαθέσιμες σε ένα συγκεκριμένο ίδρυμα, και να αποκτήσουν νέες προοπτικές σχετικά με το εκπαιδευτικό αντικείμενο υπό μελέτη.

Συμπεράσματα: Το παράδειγμα των ΕΠΕ έχει στηρίξει την ανάπτυξη καινοτόμων ΤΠΕ, νέων εκπαιδευτικών υπηρεσιών, παιδαγωγικών μεθόδων και πρακτικής για τη διά βίου μάθηση στη σύγχρονη Ευρώπη. Τα ΕΠΕ αποτελούν εξαιρετικά επίκαιρο διδακτικό και μαθησιακό εργαλείο για την νοσηλευτική εκπαίδευση.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: Εντατικά προγράμματα, Erasmus, συνεχιζόμενη νοσηλευτική εκπαίδευση.

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Erasmus Intensive Programmes: An audit of an innovative educational tool

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ABSTRACT

Background: An Erasmus Intensive Programme (EIP) is a short programme of study lasting 2-6 weeks of subject related work. Its objectives are to prepare, execute and evaluate a short course on an innovative topic, which is not part of established curriculae.

Purpose: to provide an overview of the eight EIPs and their relevance to continuous nursing education in which the nursing department of the ATEITH was involved.

Method: The case method was used in this discussion paper in order to analyze critically the EIP initiative.

Results: An EIP as a concise study educational tool can be 'dissected' in the following critical components: Target groups, Main educational activities, Learning outcomes, Expected outputs, Target topics, Main activities, Outputs, Progress of preparation, The innovative aspects and Final learning Outcomes. Thus, the 10 critical components of an EIP are presented and discussed further.

Discussion: The EIPs emphasized on wider forms of knowledge (e.g. cultural) rather than the narrower understanding of knowledge students are expected to have, arising from more traditional educational methods. They also facilitated



both students and teachers to work together in crosscultural and multinational teams in order to benefit from special learning and teaching conditions not available in a single institution, and to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied.

Conclusions: The EIP paradigm has supported the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning in contemporary Europe, which in turn makes it highly relevant teaching and learning tool for advanced nursing education.

Keywords: Intensive programmes, Erasmus, continuing nursing education.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary nursing, both in practice and education, needs to keep up to date with current developments in theory and care delivery. Therefore, a forum which encourages open discussions on recent research findings and updating improved practice would encourage nurses to make constructive improvements in health care delivery in their respective countries. This opportunity exists yet many educators are not exploiting this fully due to an unawareness of a major existing scheme, that is: the Erasmus Intensive Programmes (EIPs) which is part of the wider Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

The LLP was designed by the EU to enable people throughout their lives to partake in intense, challenging and stimulating learning experiences. Also, under this framework, the wider education and training schemes across Europe are facilitated. The programme commenced in 2007 and was concluded in 2013, absorbing funds in the region of €7 billion. The programme activities supported exchanges, study visits, and networking

activities throughout the European region. However, despite the fact that IPs are officially over, the LLP activities are now continuing under the new Erasmus+ programme from 2014 to 2020.¹

The rationale for introducing EIPs, was to improve the quality and to increase the volume of student and teaching staff mobility throughout Europe. Again, the agenda for these actions was set to achieve the “3m by 2013” goal, which was a target of least 3 million individual participants in student mobility by the year 2013. This ambitious goal was to have been reached under the recently concluded Erasmus programme and its predecessor educational schemes.²

Another objective was to improve the quality and increase the volume of multilateral cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe and to facilitate the development of innovative practices in education and training at tertiary level, and their transfer from one EIP participating country to others. Another pedagogical aim of the EIP was to learn to interpret different

sources of knowledge, and to appreciate non-verbal language through dramatization and other innovative learning styles.³

In essence, an EIP is a short program of study which can last from 2 weeks or 10 continuous full days to 6 weeks of subject related work. An EIP aims at bringing together students and staff from higher education institutions of at least three participating countries. The objectives are to prepare, execute and evaluate a short course on an innovative topic, which is not part of an established curriculae. In this sense, the EIP encourages efficient and multinational teaching of topics which might otherwise not be taught at all. It also facilitates both students and teachers to work together in crosscultural and multinational teams in order to benefit from special learning and teaching conditions not available in a single institution, and to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied.⁴

Overall, an EIP enables participating staff to exchange views on teaching content and new curricula approaches and to test teaching methods in a truly multinational classroom environment. During the EIP, specific real-life challenges regarding the topic under study are prepared, discussed and presented and group debates are encouraged in order to find innovative solutions for the challenges. The background objective is that participants should become familiar with innovative processes by gaining experience in using

novice approaches and tools for problem-solving in their specific study and work environments.⁵

In this context, another EIP example was the multinational group of nurse educators which was created for the Empowering Learning Environments in Nursing Education intensive Programme (EleneIP). This EIP showed students how to learn from within collaborative groups by considering socio-cultural characteristics of each participating country. Furthermore, this EIP inspired a study on nurse teachers' learning outcomes and experiences in social media during this EIPs international nurse teacher training course. The results showed that the knowledge and skills of using social media applications increased substantially in terms of both subjects of the course and teaching-learning methods.⁶

The EIP scheme was also used by a Greek educator to test how appropriate an EIP would be for encouraging new nurse teaching methodologies and evidence based teaching using innovative educational resources. Furthermore, within the context of five EIPs autonomously organized, with the Nursing Department of ATEITH leading, and further participation of three more EIPs as guest participants, a total involvement of 12 institutions from 9 countries, 24 staff and 110 students was achieved by the Nursing Department of ATEITH.



Each of the EIPs content and its online tool provided advanced vocational education qualifications in the form of five European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) credits.⁷ Therefore five ECTS were awarded to students for their participation in the study circles and the two week intensive course itself. Each participant institution was responsible for validating and incorporating the EIP in its curriculum. Web-2 facilities were used, providing the EIP with the means to expand the joint findings and suggestions of the sessions to a wider audience. These are a valuable addition to those wishing to advance their education and training at this level. Therefore, the Nursing Department of ATEITH has demonstrated both the importance and ability of designing and implementing EIPs, to the benefit of its nurse students.

Aim

This paper aims to provide an overview of eight EIPs and their relevance to continuous nursing education in which the nursing department of the ATEITH was involved by providing a theoretical framework and applied examples of these EIPs.

Method

The case report technique as part of the case method⁸ was used in this discussion paper in

order to analyse critically the eight EIP initiatives executed by ATEITH. Hence, an EIP as a concise study educational tool was 'dissected' in the following critical components: Target groups, Main educational activities, Learning outcomes, Expected outputs, Target topics, Main activities, Progress of preparation, The innovative aspects and Final Learning Outcomes. Thus, the 8 critical components of an EIP are presented (figure 1) and discussed below in the results section.

Results

The critical components of an EIP can be considered its building blocks from its initial conceptualization and design, up to its implementation and consequent evaluation.

Target groups: In all the eight EIPs, participating students were undergraduates, studying for BA or BSc level. Thus, the EIP courses were open to students from all study years of the first cycle (Bachelor degree) in nursing education. They were of various ages and there was a quota of male participation of at least 20%. Each country group was comprised of 4-5 students accompanied by 1-2 members of staff. The EIPs were to benefit them by broadening their horizons concerning specific aspects of health care delivery within a broader European context. Also, these courses provided staff with unique insights into different ways of teaching and

motivation. Thus, students gained new perspectives on their chosen professions. They also learned from cross-cultural stimulation and non-conventional ways of problem solving. All of the participants shared a common interest and enthusiasm for studying in a multicultural environment.

Main educational activities: the activities for the project implementation included the following:

1. At least three study circles within the home institution in order for the students to be more prepared at the commencement of the EIP.
2. Uploading relevant material to the project's website before, during and after the EIP commences.
3. Use of IT and evidence based resources such as the Cochrane collaboration, NICE and the Joanna Briggs Institute to finalize the search for solutions concerning ethical decision making in care delivery.
4. Use of information technology and web-2 facilities to search for simple solutions concerning health improvements for patients in Europe.
5. Brainstorming cross-culturally to explore innovative ideas and develop lateral thinking.
6. Producing a checklist of main risk factors and health issues challenges concerning patients in Europe.

Main activities: After six study circles preceding each EIP, students were to have compiled a portfolio that contained the health and wellbeing issues regarding ill-health of citizens in their respective countries. During the EIP the students worked in transnational groups using the material in the portfolios but also other kinds of sources. There was also cross fertilization of ideas on pragmatic ways of dealing with the nursing input concerning people in need. It was regarded vital that both good and poor practices were to be discussed openly in order that representatives from the various countries participating could ascertain whether or not an innovative idea to improve services might be efficacious in their own country.

Another key activity was to assess critically the contemporary financial, social and general constraints within each country which might influence the implementation of recommendations. More specifically, the following techniques were used in achieving this, as follows: use of information technology and web-2 facilities to search for simple solutions concerning health improvements; brainstorming cross-culturally to explore innovative ideas; producing a checklist of main risk factors and health issues concerning patients in Europe and identifying 'best practices' to be shared.



Learning outcomes: on completion of each EIP, students were confident to:

1. Discuss critically clinical issues of particular concern to patient care within a European perspective.
2. Identify nursing theories influencing health, care and well-being.
3. Describe the moral dilemmas faced by practitioners when delivering physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual/psychic care for the patient.
4. Explain the health and wellbeing needs of the patient from a broad perspective within the participating countries' health care systems.

Expected outputs: at the end of each EIP after brainstorming cross-culturally to explore innovative ideas and lateral thinking, students had to produce a concise checklist of main deontological and moral issues concerning patient care. Also, key references and support material was made readily available online to the wider community. Each EIP was finally incorporated into the teaching of subjects such as Advanced Nursing Practice, Rehabilitation and Older People's Care which were being taught in all participating institutions. Finally, further cooperation between these institutions, individual students and/or staff alike was also facilitated.

At the end of each EIP all groups presented the ideas generated for improving health outcomes of citizens in Europe as a synthesis of the work done during the EIP workload. Furthermore, each group achieved fulfilment of an innovative educational journey. Both students and teaching staff enhanced their theoretical and practical skills concerning recognition of needs and the care of patient populations across Europe. As the main meetings were held in Greece, the European participants gained first hand insight into problems confronting those in extreme financial hardship and how essential it is to adapt and devise simple preventive strategies to ensure protective and positive health outcomes.

These programmes also brought considerable multilateral cooperation between staff and students of nursing schools in Europe. The exchange of problems related to complex health care issues including the shortcomings and strengths of each participating nursing school encouraged greater transparency and compatibility between these educational institutions.

Each EIP attempted to be systematically updated and based on the best available knowledge and practices globally, enriched with the addition of local insights and observations. The course material and resources as found on the EIP website were

used by students and staff throughout the preparation and implementation phases as a readily available online tool for study and support.

Target topics: European patients groups were the focus of the discussions and exchange of ideas regarding their health and wellbeing from a broad perspective: physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual/psychic.

Progress of preparation: The preparation of each project ran smoothly with its official websites (<http://www.nursingip.eu/>; <http://www.nursingip.eu/cinema/>; <http://www.nursingip.eu/cinema2/>) especially designed for each project. This also provided a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas. On a practical level, accommodation arrangements were made for all students who stayed in a hotel close to the department where the academic activities took place. Catering arrangements were also made, involving the provisional offer of free meals by the hosting institution, regrettably have fallen through due to increasing financial burdens. Nevertheless, considerably reduced prices were secured which should have satisfied everyone involved.

ICT was used during all phases of the project (i.e. preparation, during the EIP and dissemination and follow-up). Specific tools

included SKYPE for some online discussions and MOODLE as a storing and sharing forum.

The *innovative aspects* of the project include the following:

- 1) To introduce the skill of lateral thinking as a means of finding pragmatic solutions to current or entrenched health problems concerning Europe's aging population.
- 2) To display a frank and unabashed drive for simple, cost effective solutions as opposed to suggesting the implementation of unrealistic and expensive solutions in the present difficult financial circumstances.
- 3) To create a highly motivated and dynamic cross-cultural network of health care providers who are capable of generating new and exciting ways to encourage and maintain health and wellbeing of patients in Europe.

Each project followed the principles of process-directed learning, which implies that the learning outcomes are clearly defined and that there was a clear ambition to achieve them during the course of the EIP. When summing up what the participants had learned during the EIP a panel debate was held towards the final day of the EIP in which students could ask targeted questions to the panel, consisting of experts in the field. Panel debates as a pedagogical method offers the students skills to argue in important matters. A virtual platform was the common base of the project and it was to be used before,



during and after the EIP for discussions and storage of material, which made it a valuable resource for the participants involved.

Teachers gained insight into how to pass on, to future professionals, new practices and the concept of looking for simple solutions to solve sometimes complex health care issues. A further benefit of this innovative approach to very real concerns was the close co-operation, collaboration and support between the countries involved. The sharing of ideas across the disciplines was also an 'added value' educational advantage of this programme. The core of this co-operation was the exchange of innovative ideas, good practices and pragmatic solutions. Thus, the framework of working together in a cross-cultural mode enhanced the outcomes of this approach after the EIP cooperation period, which could then be implemented back in each participant country.

Final learning Outcomes: The initial goal of the EIPs was to find simple solutions which are cost effective, efficacious and acceptable to patients in current economic environments. These were summarized and presented in a consensus statement at the end of each EIP. This was accompanied by each group presenting ideas which had been generated relating to improved health outcomes of the European Citizens, relevant to each

participating country. Therefore, the staff gained unique insight into different ways of teaching and motivating students. Similarly, students gained new perspectives on their chosen professions. Both staff and students learned to think 'outside the box' and this was of special value for those whose educational systems are still somewhat entrenched in rota-learning style teaching. Moreover, both staff and students also learned that cross-cultural stimulation can create unusual ways of problem solving. Finally, the gathering of students and staff enabled the provision of up-to-date and multifarious insights on urgent and relevant health challenges and cross border care issues.

Discussion

The emphasis of the chosen pedagogical methods used in the EIPs was to encourage interactive discussions, personal creativity and enthusiasm for lifelong learning in continuing nursing education. These projects also emphasized wider forms of knowledge (e.g. cultural, experiential, non-propositional) rather than the narrower understanding of knowledge students are expected to have, arising from more traditional educational methods. In accordance with the strategy on lifelong learning we wished to focus on systematic development of competencies, skills, and new thinking in nursing education where learning in a specific organizational

context does not happen in a vacuum; it evolves in a socio-cultural context and within cross cultural groups working together.⁹

Lifelong learning per se, implies the ability to function and interact progressively together. This is important during formal education when knowledge is created and more effectively spread if students manage to be, act, create and work together. It is a dynamic process, an interactivity in which new knowledge is generated by the cross-cultural group working together. This type of lifelong learning is not only about a single individual, concerning his/her own competence and career, but also about learning in a dynamic group such as within an EIP environment.

Due to this view the focus of our EIPs was on interactive didactic methods. By encouraging creative methods in the preparation of the portfolios we spurred students to be creative and to create together, as opposed to using teacher-led instruction. The lifelong learning perspective was also seen as an ambition to bring about a positive attitude to learning and to motivate self-directed learning, so that students also later on in working life would keep up-to-date with their subject area. This approach could act as a gateway to understanding and implementing LLP even further.¹⁰

During the two week's work with the portfolios the groups were given issues that would carry the work forward. The issues

were the same in all groups e.g. common diseases and social problems in each participant country, their structure of social and health care systems, preventive and health promoting activities, the changing roles of the elderly in the family and society, the impact of age, cultural differences and codes of conduct and, last but not least, the role of religion and spiritual wellbeing. By working with these wide issues the groups tried to find points of contact from different countries to create common grounds. This pedagogical method is called the co-operative learning method. Teachers have a double role in this process: they act both as tutors and facilitators within the international groups as well as experts whom the students are expected to consult during their work. Also, within this self-directed learning students fill the gaps in their knowledge by using the expertise of the teachers. Also other teachers at the campus can be consulted.¹¹

Our experience from these EIPs have also demonstrated that constructive learning does not only take place in the classroom; by keeping an eye on what is going on in the cultural field (e.g. movies, literature, art) one can learn a lot to strengthen one's professional role. All home groups therefore were expected to bring a movie and/or extracts of books (novels) that gave a picture of a typical health care situation in their country. As the participants were not all



native English speakers it was a challenge for the students to “visualize” and to bring about the message to the other participants in the EIP.¹²

Conclusions

The eight EIPs have highlighted the importance of exercising judgment abilities rather than gaining mere knowledge and skills. Judgment, based on sound analysis rooted in facts, is what students need to absorb from their education in today’s challenging educational environments in Europe and beyond. According to Thomas (2007)¹³, “a different kind of teaching requires a different type of teacher”. This statement is particularly relevant to the EIPs whereby the role of a teacher changes as well and moves from being a conduit for knowledge, to becoming a choreographer of a dynamic and multi-faceted discussion. In this sense, lectures are substituted by probe, encouragement, and even cajole at times.

These eight EIPs, achieved all aspirations led down by LLP wider initiatives, namely they presented a strong multidisciplinary approach by focusing on subject areas which are currently under-represented in contemporary nursing education (evidence based practice, ethical decision making and moral care, the well-being of men in Europe and older people’s needs). The EIP paradigm has now promoted enough student and staff

mobility in order to now open up a new phase in our cooperation with various European institutions.

Finally, the EIPs have been shown to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning in contemporary Europe, which in turn makes it highly relevant teaching and learning tool for advanced nursing education.

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ΑΡΕΝΔΙΧ



Figure 1: The 8 critical components of an EIP.