

Reflections on the Lille internship within the IESED Project

The Lille internship took place from 9 to 13 April 2018 with a number of 40 participants from 5 Belarusian universities.

It emerged that the internship proved to be useful, not only from a pedagogical approach, but also from a cross cultural approach, as teachers and administrative staff were given concrete and innovative teaching techniques seldom used to this day in Belarus. In this respect the Head of The Corporate Communication Centre of the Belarusian State University has just written us to ask for a visit of the video studio, with a view to implementing this process at her university.

On one hand, they seemed to be particularly interested in the teaching of foreign languages as is done at IUT A, especially the use of the language laboratory to develop their listening and comprehension skills by use of a language software programme called « Voicebook » in which they were made to listen to authentic excerpts of spoken English within a scientific context. The teaching of technologically applied English seemed to be particularly relevant to their needs and their students' too. The emphasis laid on teacher-student interaction also proved to be a valuable teaching tool in the context of the flipped classroom, as explained during a lecture.

In the course of the internship we also realised the need for intercultural communication and deepening of understanding of the French educational system, aligned on the Bologna process which Belarus still has to adopt if it wants to meet international academic benchmarks. We also noticed a failure to understand our lack of selection process when enrolling at a French university and the tuition fee policy (or lack thereof) operated in our college as well as the highly centralised and uniform IUT syllabuses aimed at giving the same graduation opportunities to students in any French IUT. Although we do not expect them to replicate the French model, it could be a helpful hint for them to reorganise their complex academic system.

As far as feedback is concerned participants seemed at first to be quite inhibited, maybe due to their lack of English speaking skills for some, and (somehow) reluctant to express their feelings the way Latin people would. Certainly a long history of Communist rule together with an authoritarian regime may have taken its toll, as was suggested by a few participants, and it is worth mentioning that the transition to a new democratic era is still slow.

From an EU report written by Damian Helly dated 10 September 2014 entitled « Belarus Context Note », the feeling of Belarusians in the mid-2000s on Western Europe was the latter « of being remote from its values » and « the recognition that the EU has little power of attraction on the population in the country. » Their past history and geographical location had brought them closer to the former Soviet Union and the Baltic countries, not to mention their Slavic language. As Belarus started to open up to the Western world, a growing interest for « foreign affairs », easier travelling opportunities and a desire to explore beyond the frontiers of a land-locked country certainly played a part in the growing feeling of being re-connected to its neighbours west of the border.

This positive attitude is best evidenced in the feedback given online by the participants who overwhelmingly enjoyed the week they spent in our college, to such an extent that Vitebsk State Technological University has signed an MoU with our university to start a cooperation in the field of innovative and smart textiles.

In view of the written remarks above, my colleague Patrick Lebègue and I were very happy to host this internship at IUT A and we hope that our Belarusian colleagues will be able to make successful use of the pedagogical tools we introduced to our partners.