

REVISITING LANGUAGE
LEARNING RESOURCES

EDITED BY

Carlos Perrián Pascual

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Wolff, J. 1982. TANDEM Madrid - Du Hilfst Mir Lernen, Ich Hilfe Dir Lernen, und so Verstehen Wir Uns Besser. *Spracharbeit* 1: 21-26 and *Hispanorama* 32: 13-18.

CHAPTER NINE

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE EXCHANGE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: MULTILINGUAL, MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES, TANDEM AND BEYOND

CLAUDIA KUNSCHAK, HEIKE PINTOR
AND BIRGIT STROTMANN

Introduction

In the era of globalization, foreign language learning has acquired a totally new dimension. On one hand, English as a Lingua Franca (Seidhofer 2004) is gaining ground, on the other, European language policy is trying to maintain linguistic diversity (Commission of the European Communities 2003), while at the same time interest in Asian languages is booming. Luckily for the present language learner, these new developments go hand in hand with a multiplication of possibilities for language exchange not only through mobility initiatives for going abroad but even at their own home institution. Language classes, multicultural campus activities and the presence of exchange students provide ample opportunity for language and culture exchange. Examining the potential of the latter group for enhancing language learning and intercultural competence has been the focus of this study.

The Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM) with a total of about 8000 students receives around 500 exchange students every year. Erasmus students from all over Europe and Garcilaso students from partner institutions in Latin America constitute the largest contingent. Those students coincide in the core courses of translation studies (mostly Erasmus), the compulsory language classes in tourism (mostly Garcilaso but also Erasmus), and the university-wide language electives (mostly Erasmus). Last year, a pilot study (Kunschak and Pintor 2005) was launched to examine the degree of integration of those exchange students into university life and the attitude of local students towards

Conclusions

Our universities are becoming more and more multicultural and multilingual. In the last two years we have experienced an important increase in foreign students, not only Erasmus from Europe but also students from Mexico, Ecuador or Colombia. The majority of students visiting our University that have participated in the tandem program enjoyed the experience and have mentioned that they have made many new friends and have improved their language skills. In total we had almost 200 students participating in this experience. Thanks to the recommendations made by these students we have decided to include new activities outside the University for next year creating a calendar of events including conferences, book reviews, movies and exhibitions. We would like to set up a classroom exclusively for tandem students, where they will be able to meet other tandems and have a place to do activities and to prepare projects or organize parties. The idea is to provide them with a meeting place that is open to anyone who wants to participate without a set timetable. As local students mingle less with visiting students, a special effort has to be made to bring them together. In this direction we are organizing a seminar for teachers in which ideas, games and coursework will be provided to promote this integration in class. It is very important that teachers are aware of the obstacles and language barriers these students suffer and the possible rejection they can be confronted with. Also it is important that our teachers encourage local students to improve their language skills to make them feel more secure when meeting people from abroad, making first contact easier.

We would also like to create a mentoring system where UEM students will help foreign students at their arrival. On the most basic level, these newly arrived students need information about the culture but also about practicalities and administrative matters. The first step is to look for potential volunteers and train them to be able to help foreign students in all aspects of their integration. We feel that the TANDEM program is essential for bringing students of all nationalities together. The cultural and language enrichment is so important that all students will benefit from it. It is our duty to promote the tandem experience even further adapting the program to new recommendations and feed-back perfecting a useful integration tool.

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