

# SOCRATES: exchange of information and experience on education systems and policy

*Claudine Dalmas*

**“ The collection, analysis and exchange of information on education systems and policies is an essential tool for developing educational cooperation, stimulating innovation and enhancing the quality of educational provision in Europe ”**



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## What is Socrates?

Socrates is the European Union action programme for cooperation in the field of education which aims to develop the European dimension in education, to promote cooperation in the field of education and to improve linguistic competence. SOCRATES is actually a collection of programmes, each one treating a specific sector of education.

Such programmes are ERASMUS for Higher education and COMENIUS for schools. Other programmes, which draw together a range of measures to support schools and language learning, are LINGUA and ODL, open and distance learning. Taken together, these programmes have the aim of increasing the European dimension of education, the exchange of information and to improve quantity and quality of European cooperation in Education.

## Erasmus: stimulating innovation through information exchange

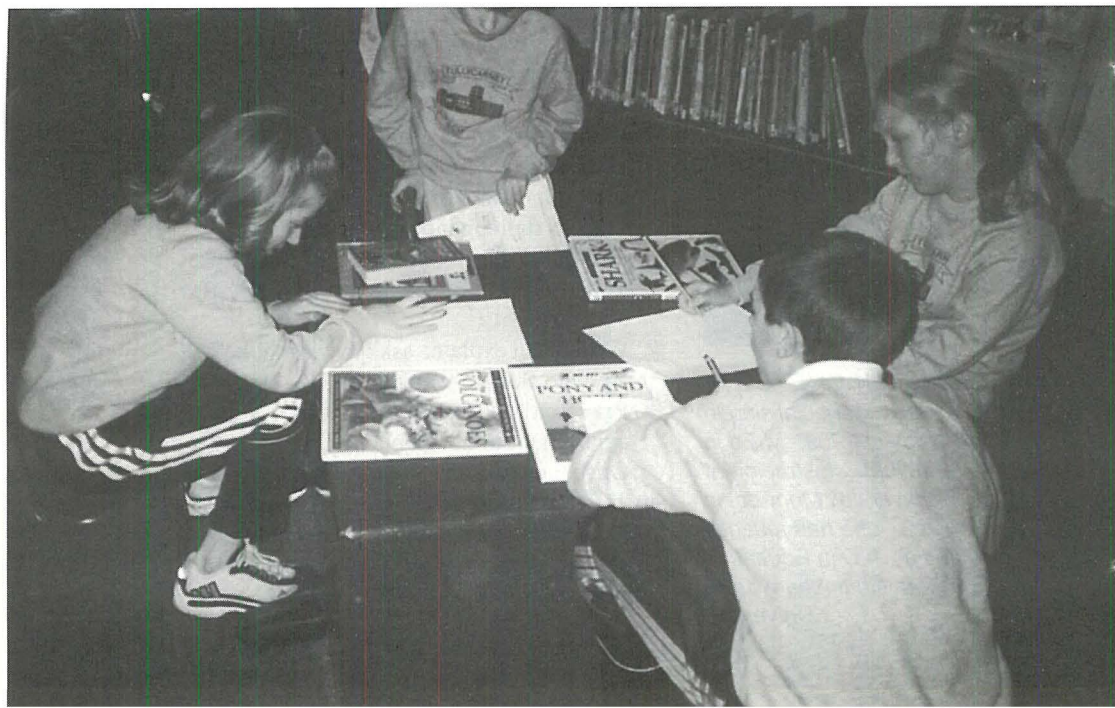
ERASMUS is open to all types of universities and academic disciplines. ERASMUS programmes consists in supporting universities to enhance the European dimension of education. ERASMUS provides student mobility grants to help students cover

the cost of educational research or a period of study in another participating country. Financial support is also provided to teaching staff for assignments of short duration in other countries for the purpose of personal and professional development. Intensive short-duration teaching programmes and curriculum development activities relating to all levels of study are also activities supported by the ERASMUS programme. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) also falls within the higher education programme, with the aim of allowing students to obtain recognizable credits in a foreign university. The Senate of the University of Malta approved this system in 1998.

## Comenius: school education

COMENIUS promotes cooperation in the field of education at nursery, primary, secondary and further education levels. The programme's objectives contain a set of comprehensive set of actions to boost cooperation between schools, to help enhance the professionalism of teachers and to contribute to achieving an inclusive, high quality education for all young people. COMENIUS is divided into three distinct but interlocking sets of Actions.

Action 1: supports multilateral partnerships



between schools working on collaborative European Education Projects (EEP).

Action 2: supports transnational projects addressing the particular educational needs of the children of migrant workers, occupational travellers, as well as intercultural education.

Action 3: supports transnational projects focusing on the in-service training of teachers and other educationalists.

## What's in it for school teachers?

The COMENIUS programme promotes the European dimension of teaching through exchange of information and experience. It also aims to raise levels of school achievement and participation by enhancing the skills of educational staff directly involved in improving school performance through teacher mobility, exchanges and contact among pupils. These aims are achievable through the support of partnerships between schools, which enables them to develop a European Education Project (EEP). EEP focuses on the cultural heritage, environmental issues, science and technology and other topics of mutual interest to pupils in different European Countries.

Nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special schools are all eligible to participate. Colleges of further education and Sixth Form Colleges are also eligible. All institutions in a partnership must be eligible to participate in order for an EEP to be approved.

COMENIUS provides support or measures which will enhance teacher professionalism and capacity to respond to the challenges of the teaching and learning environment. COMENIUS support to teachers is provided in the form of grants and financial support for the preparation, joint development and implementation of programmes, and to enable teachers to participate in in-service training activities.

## Socrates: supported educational initiatives

A number of students from the faculty of Education were able to benefit from the SOCRATES programmes in terms of funding for their educational research visits. Visits to Sweden and Norway were undertaken in connection with a unit in Early Childhood Education, which is offered to the third year B.Ed (Hons) students who are specialising in the teaching of young learners. For the unit Observations in Early childhood Education students were given the possibility to visit and observe teaching in schools overseas. Two B.Ed (Hons) students specialising in the teaching of English, were able to conduct a period of educational research with the aim of evaluating teaching and learning strategies in the primary classrooms in Belfast, Northern



Observing creative tasks in the primary classrooms. Research in Belfast by Dalmas and Micallef, supported by the SOCRATES programme.

Ireland. Also, three students from the Department of Communications were able to participate as 'stagiaires' in work ex placements in the SOCRATES Technical Assistance Office in Brussels for a period of nine months. Other students were supported to attend to and present papers in European network meetings, example: Environmental education and German Studies.

These initiatives carried out with the full support of the SOCRATES programmes not only provide professional and personal enrichment, but also improve education through partnerships across national boundaries. In so doing SOCRATES helps to exploit the full potential of Europe's human resources and to promote the development of a modern and humane society in which all citizens can play a full and active part.

## More information?

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