

**PELLIC**  
**Practice Enterprise for Language Learning &  
Intercultural Communication**

**JOINT REPORT ON PRACTICE ENTERPRISE  
PEDAGOGY, LANGUAGE LEARNING AND  
EDUCATIONAL ICT**

**March-April 2010**

## Index

1. INTRODUCTION. National scenarios .....	3
2. MAIN FINDINGS .....	4
2.1. Introduction to the surveyed institutions in each country .....	4
2.2. Information from teachers using PE pedagogy .....	4
a) Czech Republic .....	4
b) Finland .....	5
c) Germany .....	6
d) Spain .....	6
2.3. Information from students using PE pedagogy .....	7
a) Czech Republic .....	7
b) Finland .....	8
c) Germany .....	8
d) Spain .....	9
3. CONCLUSIONS .....	10

## **1. INTRODUCTION. National scenarios concerning PE pedagogy, language learning and educational ICT**

The Practice Enterprise methodology has been used in Finland since 1992 and consequently, in this survey this is the country presenting the longest tradition in the implementation of this type of pedagogy. Thus, their first enterprise was set up in 1993 and their Enterprise Centre (FINPEC) was established in 1994. This historical line of implementation has helped Finnish institutions to test and assess every activity carried out and also, to create the ideal learning environment for both institutions and students.

The main fields where the Practice Enterprise methodology is developed are Entrepreneurship and Business with very successful outcomes (about 120 practice enterprises have been founded). Furthermore, this kind of methodology is being implemented in their whole range of educational institutes.

The German scenario presents 600 practice enterprises which are currently operating. The Practice Enterprise pedagogy is used both in vocational and continuing education and also, to some extent in secondary schools.

In the Czech Republic the Practice Enterprise methodology was brought from Austria in 1992 and nowadays it is mainly used in secondary and vocational training educational institutions. The national Centre of Fictional Companies is a member of EUROOPEN and has 276 companies registered.

In Spain the Practice Enterprise methodology is pretty unknown except for certain areas in the Autonomous Communities of Catalunya and Andalucia. In the former, we find examples of Practice Enterprise courses mainly in Vocational Educational Training in the fields of Business and Marketing. They have an important support through the INFORM Foundation and its SEFED PROGRAMME for Practice Enterprise pedagogy. In the latter, training courses are being developed through the local council and town halls for unemployed people and to a small extent, for entrepreneurs. The main objective here is to foster local business development on the one hand; and on the other, to enhance skills for getting access to the labour market on equal terms compared to other candidate groups. And as a result, we can find about 300 practice firms in Spain.

At a university level this kind of methodology is not being carried out due to its complexity in organization (i.e. several subjects must be involved simultaneously through a specific period of time, which makes it very difficult to include such a pedagogical system in the undergraduate programmes). Hopefully, the new ECTS scenario will help re-organize the entire system and consequently, the methodology applied to lecturing sessions. This process has already started but it will take some time before we can see major changes in the university arena.

Concerning language learning, the Practice Enterprise methodology does not apply, as we can observe the traditional method being used (drilling in the four communication skills) irrespective of whether it is general language or language for specific purposes. Moreover, the students' mother tongue is constantly used in class by both teachers and students unfortunately.

## 2. MAIN FINDINGS

### 2.1. Introduction to the surveyed institutions in each country

Three experienced institutions in the use of Practice Enterprise methodology have collaborated in the Finnish survey: two universities of applied sciences and a business college dealing with both adult and vocational education. Concerning teachers' participation, we find English Language teachers with a wide practice in this kind of pedagogy. And regarding students' participation, in both universities students are doing their first academic year; in the case of the business college, the survey involves students who are undertaking their first and second academic years.

In Germany we can find two public schools: one vocational dealing with Business and Trade; and the other one, secondary dealing with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The third institution is private and it is sponsored by the Lutheran church. They deal with programmes for young people with learning disabilities and social disadvantages. Concerning the teachers involved in the survey, they have less than 5 years' experience in Practice Enterprise generally speaking. As for the students participating in this study, they are all working in Practice Enterprise companies which are supported by the ZUEF (the central office of the Association of German Practice Enterprises). They are all tertiary students in public and private business schools and also, in continuing education.

About 40 schools collaborated in the Czech survey from vocational and training institutions. All polled students are in their second, third and fourth academic years. Regarding the teachers who answered the questionnaires, only one teacher out of 10 has been using PE methodology for over 10 years; the others have been using this particular methodology between 3 and 5 years.

Three institutions have participated in Spain from the Autonomous Community of Catalunya: two high schools and a town hall. Concerning the high schools, they are both public institutions and the survey focused on Vocational Educational Training in Marketing and Business Management. The town hall involved in this project focused the survey on their SEFED PROGRAMME courses on Administration and Management. In all three cases, the teachers who have participated have over ten years' teaching experience. Referring to the students, they are in their first academic year in the case of both high schools; and they are adults regarding the town hall programmes.

### 2.2. Information from teachers using PE pedagogy

#### a) Czech Republic

On a regular basis, most Czech students work with the Internet and have to make use of interactive blackboards. In some schools Moodle is used during class time as a support tool both for the teacher and for the students. As far as PE activities are concerned, students need PCs/laptops, e-mail, Microsoft Office Suite, and a seminar room.

The main fields of study in which the Practice Enterprise methodology is developed are economics, management, accounting, and marketing, all of them obligatory subjects for the students. The groups of students range from 20 to 30.

The purpose of using this kind of methodology is prioritized as follows: first, to strengthen communication skills; second, to strengthen team work; third, to strengthen critical analysis; fourth, to develop organizational skills; fifth, to strengthen leadership skills; and finally, to link theory and practice.

The Practice Enterprise activities are developed through team work (teams consisting of 3 to 5 students, in some cases, 9-student groups can be found), pair work, and also individual work. The tasks are both guided and open or creative. The outcome is an oral presentation and consequently, students' assessment is based on oral skills.

Teachers are pretty satisfied both with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology and also, with the outcomes related to the amount of effort invested in developing the Practice Enterprise activities.

## **b) Finland**

The tools that are most frequently used concerning ICT are Internet, e-mail, Microsoft Office Suite, virtual learning environments, online communication tools and sometimes, blogs.

The main fields of study in which the Practice Enterprise methodology is developed are international business, information technology, nursing, entrepreneurial studies, business and economics, law, and accountancy and finance. The groups of students – which range from 30 to 60 students – are mixed (from different fields) and also multicultural. It is worthwhile to remark that the Finnish institutions undertake degree programmes in English.

The main resources used in the classroom are blackboards, PCs/laptops, e-mail, Microsoft Office Suite, virtual learning environments, online communication tools, and meeting rooms.

The purpose of using this kind of methodology is prioritized as follows: first, to strengthen communication skills; second, to link theory and practice; third, to strengthen team work; fourth, to develop organizational skills and critical analysis; and fifth, to strengthen leadership. Also, improving intercultural communication is perceived as an important goal.

The Practice Enterprise activities are developed through team work (teams consisting of 3 to 9 students), pair work, and also individual work. The tasks are both guided and open or creative, mainly based on problem solving. The outcome is a written document, an oral presentation or a portfolio.

Students are given feedback either weekly or after every session and the assessment is based on written skills, oral skills, and social, organizational and technical competences.

Teachers are relatively satisfied with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology. On the one hand, it is an efficient and practical approach to teaching. However, mixing students from different programmes is seen as a problem to develop the various activities in a successful way.

Also, teachers are relatively satisfied with the outcomes related to the amount of effort invested in developing the Practice Enterprise activities. They argue that this methodology cannot be applied conveniently in case of big groups of students and also, in case of students who have different language skills.



### c) Germany

The tools that are most frequently used concerning ICT are Internet, e-mail, Microsoft Office Suite, virtual learning environments, and an accountancy programme.

The main fields of study in which the Practice Enterprise methodology is developed are business and economy, accountancy and finance, and an online contest in economy from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The groups of students range from 15 to 30. However, English is a separate subject from the Practice Enterprise activities.

The main resources used in the classroom are blackboards, PCs/laptops, Microsoft Office Suite, virtual learning environments, online communication tools, and meeting rooms and flipcharts.

The two most important objectives for using this kind of methodology are linking theory and practice and strengthening organizational skills and critical analysis.

The Practice Enterprise activities are developed through team work (teams consisting of 3 to 5 students), pair work, and also individual work. The tasks are both guided and open or creative. The outcome is a written document, an oral presentation or a debate.

The range in which students are given feedback varies from not having much monitoring of activities to providing feedback every week in an interview format. The assessment is mainly based on competences, except in the case of the online contest where every session students are also assessed by an external jury on their oral presentations.

Teachers are relatively satisfied with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology. On the one hand, it is a valuable tool, since students seem to have better opportunities when applying for a job. However, some students do not take these activities too seriously and consequently teachers perceive that it is not possible to speak about a total authenticity of the practice enterprise itself, i.e. the relationship that students must establish between customers and suppliers.

Also, teachers are pretty satisfied with the outcomes related to the amount of effort invested in developing the Practice Enterprise activities. They argue that at first, the work load was too high for them but it is acceptable now and also, that the outcomes are very satisfactory.

### d) Spain

The tools that are most frequently used concerning ICT are Internet, e-mail, and Microsoft Office Suite.

The main fields of study in which the Practice Enterprise methodology is developed are business and economics, accountancy and finance, languages, and computing. The groups of students range from 15 to 30 students. It is worthwhile to remark that as far as language learning is concerned, in the case of secondary education English is a separate subject from the Practice Enterprise activities, however it is part of this pedagogy in the case of adult education.

The main resources used in the classroom are Internet, e-mail, PCs/laptops, Microsoft Office Suite, and meeting rooms. Also, telephone and fax, and a business management software programme.

The purpose of using this kind of methodology is prioritized as follows: first, to link theory and practice; second, to strengthen team work; third, to improve critical analysis; fourth, to strengthen communication skills; and fifth, to strengthen leadership.

The Practice Enterprise activities are developed through team work (teams consisting of 3 to 5 students, and being also multicultural), pair work, and also individual work. The tasks are both guided and open or creative. The outcome is a written document or an oral presentation, except for adult education where we can find a portfolio, an oral presentation, and a debate.

The frequency with which students are given feedback varies notably. The only case in which activities are closely monitored is in adult education where feedback is given every week by every participant involved the Practice Enterprise methodology. The assessment is based on oral skills and competences and it is provided in a written format. In the case of adult education, assessment is primarily based on competences.

Teachers are highly satisfied with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology. However, this methodology cannot be applied conveniently in those cases where big groups of students are found.

Also, teachers are relatively satisfied with the outcomes related to the amount of effort invested in developing the Practice Enterprise activities. They argue that this methodology enables students to become more motivated because they are more involved in the whole business procedures of an enterprise. And especially in the case of adult education, the Practice Enterprise methodology offers a more dynamic and practical way of learning, which is ideal for vocational training.

### **2.3. Information from students using PE pedagogy**

#### **a) Czech Republic**

Concerning languages, secondary students can choose from English, German, French, and sometimes, Spanish and Russian (only business and technical language are an option when dealing with languages for specific purposes). However, the students' mother tongue is sometime used when teaching languages; and moreover, no subjects are taught in English.

The Practice Enterprise methodology is applied in Mathematics, Business Management, Human Resources, Accountancy, Marketing, Economics, and International Trade. Also, it is applied to some extent in teaching foreign languages.

The resources that students need in order to carry out the Practice Enterprise tasks are PCs/Laptops, e-mail, and Microsoft Office Suite. A virtual learning environment (Moodle) is used, although to a smaller extent.

The surveyed students point out that this type of methodology generally implies a significant work load for them. The tasks are mostly developed in class time.

Not all students agree on the frequency of feedback provided on their assessment. Less than half the students affirm that they are informed on their assessment either always or usually.

Czech students are very satisfied with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology in their studies and also, with the assessment achieved from their activities.



## **b) Finland**

Finnish students have two compulsory foreign languages included in their curricula, which are English and German. Regarding electives, Spanish, German, French, and Italian are the most frequently chosen subjects.

The Practice Enterprise methodology is applied to Mathematics, Business Management, Human Resources, Accountancy, Marketing, Economics, and International Trade.

The activities are equally developed through team work, pair work or on an individual basis. They are undertaken both in class time and during their free time investing between 5 and 15 hours per week.

Most students agree that feedback on their assessment is frequently provided.

Concerning students' satisfaction with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology in their studies, they are quite satisfied because in general, they believe it is an effective method that offers them practical knowledge they could apply in their future careers. However, the surveyed students feel they need more guidance and theory lessons in order to achieve a better background for performing the activities. Also, participation is not equally understood by all members of the team.

Half the students are not highly satisfied with the assessment provided considering the effort they have invested in doing the activities. They argue that not all the work done is assessed and also, some of them affirm not to be motivated with this methodology. The other half seem to be very satisfied though.

## **c) Germany**

English is the compulsory foreign language to be included in German curricula. French appears to be the mostly chosen elective subject, although the rate is not significant.

The Practice Enterprise methodology is applied in Mathematics, Business Management, Human Resources, Accountancy, Marketing, Economics, and International Trade. Also, it is applied to some extent in teaching foreign languages.

The resources that students need in order to carry out the Practice Enterprise tasks are PCs/Laptops, e-mail, and Microsoft Office Suite. A virtual learning environment, online communication tools and blogs, and meeting rooms and flipcharts are also needed although to a smaller extent.

The surveyed students point out that this type of methodology generally implies a work load for them. The tasks are mostly developed in class time but free time is also needed.

Most students agree that feedback on their assessment is quite frequently provided.

Concerning students' satisfaction with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology in their studies, they are quite satisfied because it offers them independent learning and also, learning by doing; furthermore, it encourages teamwork and active participation.

Most students are quite satisfied with the assessment provided considering the effort they have invested in doing the activities. They argue that when finishing their tasks, they feel they have achieved something out of their work. However, they claim that preparation time is not included in the assessment of Practice Enterprise activities and they believe they invest long hours in it.



#### d) Spain

English is the only compulsory foreign language included in the students' curricula. French appears to be the only foreign language most frequently chosen as an elective. However, and differing from the above-mentioned countries, the students' mother tongue is excessively used during class time.

The Practice Enterprise methodology is applied in Human Resources, Accountancy, Marketing, Logistics, Buying and Selling Management, and International Trade.

The resources that students need in order to carry out the Practice Enterprise tasks are PCs/Laptops, e-mail, Internet, Microsoft Office Suite, telephones, printers, photocopiers, and an accountancy software programme. A virtual learning environment, online communication tools and blogs, and meeting rooms and flipcharts are also needed although to a smaller extent.

The activities are carried out mostly through team work, although individual work is regarded as important. The exception is the case of adult education where those tasks are equally developed through team work, pair work or on an individual basis. They are undertaken both in class time and during their free time investing between 3 and 6 hours per week. Half the students consider that this methodology overloads them with work (mostly adult students), whereas the other half believes this is not the case.

Most students agree that feedback on their assessment is frequently provided and generally, by three teachers who offer students simultaneous information on their learning progress.

Concerning students' satisfaction with the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology in their studies, they are very satisfied, especially adult students.

Most students are very satisfied with the assessment provided considering the effort they have invested in doing the activities. In general, they state that this methodology is a good way to find out what the business world is actually like through hands-on experience. However, they argue that resources and organization should be improved; that there should be more guidance by teachers on the work to be undertaken; and finally, both young and adult students agree on affirming that individual effort is not assessed.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Practice Enterprise is so well established in Finland that it has become part of the system, at least in the educational institutions object of this survey. As a result, students are acquainted with this type of methodology and assume it as part of their studies. Probably this is the reason why an important number of students do not associate the development of Practice Enterprise activities with an increase of work load. But in the Czech Republic, Germany and Spain the Practice Enterprise methodology is applied in – and thus, adapted to – those situations conducive to meet students' needs. For secondary students, it is a way to get introduced into the business world; for vocational training it is an ideal tool to acquire those competences and practical application that students will need in their professional careers. In Spain, in particular, the case of adult education is outstanding, especially the case of vocational training for unemployed people. Here the Practice Enterprise methodology is certainly tailored in order to enable students to acquire those competences needed to succeed in such a competitive labour market as the one we are confronted with at present. And in the Czech Republic, Germany and Spain, Practice Enterprise is not applied in undergraduate curricula.

Undoubtedly, ICT tools are needed in the development of Practice Enterprise activities. However, there is no integration of all the available resources, not to mention the scarce usage of a virtual learning environment. This integration is fundamental, since contacts among the various established Practice Enterprise firms should be made on a regular basis in order to make it authentic. Otherwise, students would lack motivation and commitment and therefore, the use of the Practice Enterprise methodology would become a failure.

Apart from Finland, where the educational system offers degree programmes taught in English, language learning is hardly integrated in Practice Enterprise contexts and instead the national language is generally used. Nowadays this barrier should be overcome, as there is no doubt English is the lingua franca that every kind of professional makes use of when developing their activities in international settings. Furthermore, language learning in Spain lacks a solid educational basis that should lead to students' success at the time of communicating in a foreign language.

Generally speaking, two factors influence the degree of commitment and motivation shown by the students. On the one hand, mixing students from different degree programmes (as is the case in Finland) complicates the convenient and smooth progress of the activities. On the other hand, having big groups of students implies a high risk of heterogeneous participation when dealing with team work and hence, of unsatisfactory outcomes. From the teachers' point of view, this scenario does not enable them to monitor both students and tasks as closely as it would be convenient in order to assure a successful learning practice. Consequently, this becomes reflected in the data on satisfaction with Practice Enterprise presented in our survey, where we can see that some students and teachers are critical with the use of this methodology and its assessment. In the Spanish case, it is important to note that nearly three quarters of the polled students see Practice Enterprise activities as an increase in their work load, the reason probably being that this methodology differs considerably from the traditional Spanish teaching methods. For this reason, the levels of satisfaction with the Practice Enterprise methodology (with both its usage and assessment) are so varied, being higher in the case of adult education, since mature students have a different perception of their lacks and needs.

What is relevant to point out is the factors that lead to the students' lack of motivation:

- Focusing assessment too much on team work and leaving individual work aside.



- Poor organization and description of the Practice Enterprise activities (from the students' point of view).
- Big groups of students.

In conclusion, although there are problems inherent to the usage of a Practice Enterprise methodology, one cannot question its potential for fostering a professional learning. It will be necessary then to keep on working in order to improve every single aspect involved in it, i.e. from organization and resources to assessment and a global application of ICT tools that could guarantee a smooth development of the assigned tasks. This would enhance students' motivation and therefore, successful outcomes.