

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies / Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá

URL of the journal / URL časopisu: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk>

Author(s) / Autor(i): Frédéric Delaneuville
Article / Článok: Reconciling the Acquisition of Professional Skills and the Development of Critical Thinking through a Transdisciplinary and Cross-Disciplinary Approach to Teaching: The Strategy of the Slovak-French University Institute / Zosúladenie nadobudnutia odborných zručností a rozvoja kritického myslenia prostredníctvom transdisciplinárneho a medzidisciplinárneho prístupu k výučbe: stratégia Slovensko-francúzskeho univerzitného inštitútu

Publisher / Vydavateľ: Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – MBU Banská Bystrica / Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2020.23.2.263-269>

Recommended form for quotation of the article / Odporúčaná forma citácie článku:

DELANEUVILLE, F. 2020. Reconciling the Acquisition of Professional Skills and the Development of Critical Thinking through a Transdisciplinary and Cross-Disciplinary Approach to Teaching: The Strategy of the Slovak-French University Institute. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Vol. 23, No. 2, 2020. ISSN 1335 – 2741, pp. 263-269. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2020.23.2.263-269>

By submitting their contribution the author(s) agreed with the publication of the article on the online page of the journal. The publisher was given the author's / authors' permission to publish and distribute the contribution both in printed and online form. Regarding the interest to publish the article or its part in online or printed form, please contact the editorial board of the journal: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

Poskytnutím svojho príspevku autor(i) súhlasil(i) so zverejnením článku na internetovej stránke časopisu Politické vedy. Vydavateľ získal súhlas autora / autorov s publikovaním a distribúciou príspevku v tlačenej i online verzii. V prípade záujmu publikovať článok alebo jeho časť v online i tlačenej podobe, kontaktujte redakčnú radu časopisu: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

RECONCILING THE ACQUISITION OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH A TRANSDISCIPLINARY AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO TEACHING: THE STRATEGY OF THE SLOVAK-FRENCH UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

Frédéric Delaneuille*

The original aim of European universities was above all the development of critical thinking. Nowadays, a different conception of higher education which is focused on the acquisition of technical skills that can be immediately mobilised on the labour market has the wind in its sails and the question of students' employability seems to have become a priority. Thus, university teachers have gradually been given a new mission: to prepare the integration of students into the labour market (Gura, Rošteková, 2018). In Slovakia's highly fragmented university landscape, where there is an abundant offer of study programmes, it is often the employment opportunities that prevail for young people in their choice of higher education. However, is it really possible to prepare the future of our students without addressing the issue of their personal development and critical thinking? In an ever-changing globalized world, it is essential that students have the tools to understand and anticipate changes in society in different fields. Some authors such as **Dominique Wolton** defend the original objective of developing critical thinking in universities and militate against the commodification of education underway on other continents (Wolton, 2019). The multiplication of actors and interactions that characterizes postmodernity (Chevallier, 2003) leads to a certain uniformity but also to increased complexity. Some authors, such as the philosopher **Edgard Morin**, propose a method for "complex thought". Considering that the compartmentalization of science is an obstacle to grasping reality, he advocates a transdisciplinary approach - "I hold

* Frédéric Delaneuille, PhD. is a member of the Slovak-French University Institute and an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Management, Faculty of Management of Comenius University in Bratislava, Odbojárov 10, 820 05 Bratislava, Slovak Republic, e-mail: frederic.delaneuille@fm.uniba.sk.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2020.23.2.263-269>

it impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole, nor to know the whole without knowing the parts" (Morin, 2014). Pascal's principle, which is one of the paradigms of the method for grasping complexity (Pascal, 1844), is inspiring for those in charge of university courses whose internal logic sometimes leads to hyper-specialization and compartmentalization of disciplines, but also for students who are often too focused on acquiring specific skills to better sell themselves on the job market. Admittedly, students, sometimes too obsessed with achieving their short-term professional objectives, which sometimes involve carrying out hyper-specialized tasks in an increasingly complex value creation chain, are not necessarily aware of the contribution that the study of certain sciences will make to the development of their professional career. In Slovakia, as elsewhere, there is a lot of criticism of what they consider to be too 'theoretical' training, and the gap that sometimes exists between what is taught at university and the skills required on the labour market reinforces their perception of things. Yet the knowledge acquired during their university studies, even if it is not immediately mobilized during their first professional experience, will enable them to grasp the world through different scientific prisms and to understand the changes in a rapidly evolving world. The broad spectrum of sciences taught in our universities develops the students' ability to decipher contemporary trends by placing them in the "long term".

The Slovak-French University Institute (IUFS) convinced that the preparation of students' professional future is not incompatible with a critical thinking through a multidisciplinary scientific culture, has set up various actions that are part of a global strategy to prepare the integration of young people from the high school into the professional world while allowing personal growth through French culture thanks to a transversal approach.

The "Student-Companies-Universities Forum" is undoubtedly one of the events that illustrates this strategy. Created nine years ago at the Faculty of Management of Comenius University in Bratislava, this annual event has gradually involved various Slovak academic and institutional partners in its organisation. It has progressively established itself as one of the flagship events for French-Slovak university cooperation and the promotion of teaching of French and "à la française" at the university.

This year the Faculty of Management, the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Law and the UNESCO Chair of Multilingual and Multicultural Communication of Comenius University in Bratislava joined forces to organize the 9th edition of the Forum which was held on 3 March 2020 at the rector's hall of Comenius

University in Bratislava under the high patronage of the new President of the University Mr. **Marek Števček** who officially opened the event. Numerous partners such as the French Institute in Bratislava, the French Embassy in Slovakia, the European Parliament Information Office in Slovakia, the European Commission Representative Office in Slovakia, the French School in Bratislava, the French-Slovak Chamber of Commerce and many others were involved in the organisation of the event, which illustrates the desire to create a transversal approach to offer prospects to young French-speaking people.

Creating a link between high schools, universities and the professional world thanks to the French language

Ms. **Anna Butasova**, UNESCO Chair in Multilingual and Multicultural Communication at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the Comenius University in Bratislava, stressed the importance of multilingualism at the university, as foreign languages are not only a comparative advantage in the labour market, but also a means of access to different cultures and thus to different world views, thereby promoting the formation of critical thinking. The latter occupies a central place in the curricula of secondary education in France, which revolves around dialectics. In the various high schools where French is taught, and particularly in bilingual or "enhanced French" high schools, teachers are not only in charge of teaching grammar, but they are also ambassadors of French culture and its uniqueness. Mr. **Jean-Pierre Jarjanette**, Director of the French Institute in Bratislava, recalled that the French State has for many years been co-financing the posts of French language assistants who are part of this logic. Mr. **François Tricoire** and Mr. **Olivier Dumontel**, French language assistants at Comenius University in Bratislava, organised a quiz on the French language for the occasion, highlighting the range of university courses in French in Slovakia. The aim of the first part of the Forum was to inform high school students about the prospects offered to French speakers at the university. Mr. **Radovan Gura**, Director of the IUFS and Ms. **Zuzana Puchovská**, President of the Francavis Association, presented to the French-speaking high school students from all over Slovakia the wide range of courses offered by Slovak universities in French: management, economics, law, political science, literature, translation, etc. The Dean of the Faculty of Management of Comenius University in Bratislava, Mr. **Michal Greguš**, reminded the quality of certain Slovak faculties which are very well positioned in international rankings and

which offer courses in many languages. The Erasmus mobility programme allows students to improve their language skills abroad and sometimes even to complete their education with a double degree course which allows students to obtain a French degree in addition to their Slovak university degree.

Encourage critical thinking of students through a transdisciplinary approach in French: the example of the Master of European Studies of the European University Centre in Nancy

The French language allows access to quality university education which in turn allows privileged access to prestigious careers in certain international organizations or companies. This is the case of the double degree "Master of European Studies: strategic management of companies in Europe" which associates four Slovak universities: Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Comenius University in Bratislava, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra and the University of Economics in Bratislava.

The sociology of organisations has shown that structures often develop interests of their own that deviate from their initial objectives (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). This sociological reality can be observed in universities as well as in other structures. In a competitive environment the different actors, in search of symbolic power, sometimes develop individualistic strategies to the detriment of the optimal collective solution. The existence of the IUFS has made it possible, despite a highly competitive environment linked to the fragmented offer of study programmes in Slovakia, for four Slovak universities to pool their resources to offer their students an original study programme in French. This associative structure has been able to find synergies between the university courses in which French is taught in order to give students a quality university education that complements their initial training in their respective universities. Thus, for about ten years now, the European University Centre of Nancy has been offering in Slovakia its original and transdisciplinary approach to the teaching of European and international issues. The Master of European Studies was presented at the Forum by its manager Mr. **Vincent Fromentin**, assistant professor at the University of Lorraine. This course enables Slovak students (and obviously students from other countries) to obtain a Master's degree from the French University to complement the Slovak Master's degree. This study programme is open to all students with a University Bachelor's degree (in

Slovakia, in Europe and outside Europe) preparing a Master's degree in a French-speaking Slovak partner faculty. Students enrolled in this programme continue to follow their studies at their home university. Several courses are taught by teachers from the University of Lorraine who come to Slovakia, by Slovak academics as well as by professionals. The courses take place in the form of intensive training blocks several times per semester. This master degree gives access to a wide range of job opportunities and professions (career within the European institutions, adviser in financing and development of companies in Europe, translator, researcher in development of SMEs in Europe, junior accountant and financial auditor, head of department in the government or in international organisations, marketing manager, etc.). This study programme is designed to give students a European culture but it also enables them to acquire new technical skills in many fields (economic, financial, legal and geopolitical, corporate finance, financial economics, corporate governance, marketing, human resources management, etc.) which are appreciated on the labour market. This Master's degree in European Studies is a perfect illustration of the advantages of a transdisciplinary and transversal approach to higher education, which involves both the development of critical thinking skills that enable students to evolve in a highly unstable international context and the acquisition of new skills required by the professional environment.

Preparing the professional integration of French-speaking students

The objective of the Forum 2020 was also to give francophone high school and university students professional prospects in a world where English seems to reign alone. In the second part of the Forum, moderated by Mr. **Marián Giba**, the idea was to promote multilingualism. The command of English no longer seems to make the difference on the labour market and the French Ambassador to Slovakia, His Excellency Mr. **Christophe Léonzi**, reminded that the command of French is a clear comparative advantage in Slovakia due to the presence of more than 400 French companies. The Chief Financial Officer of Orange Mr. **Reza Sandjee**, and a representative of Human Resources of PSA, recalled the advantage of command of French in their respective companies and they stressed the importance of mastering foreign languages in a professional career. Moreover, French is also a language used by many multinationals established in Slovakia, some of which were represented at the

Forum. Mr. **Dionýz Hochel**, Director of the European Parliament's Information Office in Slovakia and Ms. **Emília Andrejová** from the European Commission Representative Office in Slovakia recalled that French remains a very important language within the European institutions and it is the language of interpretation of the European treaties. In the third part of the Forum, the informal meetings organised around the stands enabled discussions between students and professionals. Every year students are recruited during this event by companies looking for French speakers because mastering foreign languages is a professional skill, but it is above all a sign of the open-mindedness that human resources managers are fond of. Mr. **Alexander Svetlík**, a student of the French program of the Faculty of Management of Comenius University in Bratislava who created his company during his studies, testifies to the inventiveness and initiative of the polyglot students. Ms. **Daniela Danišová** of the French-Slovak Chamber of Commerce, which offers support services to French companies established in Slovakia, highlighted in her speech the importance of the French language in her professional career.

Conclusion

The success of the 9th edition of the Forum shows that the Slovak-French University Institute's strategy bears fruit. The partnerships set up between universities, associations, institutions and companies make it possible to develop trainings that meets the current needs of the labour market without sacrificing the development of critical thinking which, through dialectics, plays a central role in education "à la française". Foreign languages in general, and French in particular, provide access to a singular culture and thus to another vision of the world. It also makes it possible to follow quality university courses in Slovakia. The double degree "Master of European Studies" presented during this event shows that it is possible to reconcile culture, personal development and the acquisition of professional skills thanks to a transdisciplinary approach in which all sciences, including literary and linguistic, have their place. Plurilingualism and "French-style" education aim at the personal development of young people from high school onwards and gives them an opening to the world that will be useful to them throughout their lives. It thus seems possible to overcome the apparent dichotomy between the original logic of European universities and the contemporary demands of the labour market by putting in place inclusive strategies in which all stakeholders have an interest.

References:

- CHEVALLIER, J. 2003. *L'État post-moderne*. Paris : LGDJ, coll. « Droit et société », 2017, 328 p., préf. Jacques Commaille, 1re éd. 2003, ISBN : 978-2-275-05763-7.
- CROZIER, M. et FRIEDBERG, E. 1977. *L'acteur et le système*. Paris : Seuil, p. 15.
- GURA, R. - ROŠTEKOVÁ, M. 2018. Francúzsky model profesionalizácie terciárneho vzdelávania na Slovensku. In *Politické vedy*. Vol. 21, No. 3, 2018. ISSN 1335 – 2741, pp. 236-244.
- MORIN, E. 2014. *Introduction à la pensée complexe*. Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2014.
- PASCAL, B. 1844. *Pensées, fragments et lettres de Blaise Pascal*, publiés pour la première fois par M. Prosper Faugère, Andrieux Editeur, Paris 1844, p. 72.
- WOLTON, D. 2019. *La création d'un espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur, 20 ans après le lancement du processus de Bologne*. Colloque scientifique international organisé par le Département des relations internationales et de la diplomatie de la Faculté de sciences politiques et de relations internationales de l'Université Matej Bel de Banská Bystrica, le 7 octobre 2019.