

The Development of the Intercultural Dimension through the Use of Websites in Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract. Are virtual environments conducive to the development of intercultural competences among students of foreign languages? The present study seeks to give a substantiated answer to this question by presenting and analysing the results of a project carried out as part of a course in Communication and American Civilization with the first year students of English language in the University of Korca, Albania. The study makes an assessment of the role played by websites in promoting the intercultural dimension while practising foreign language skills. Our assesment is based on a careful examination of the students’ language biograpy records - a major component of the European Language Portfolio - and a comparison between the results of their self-assessment with regards to the different cultural components before the beginning of the project and after its completion. The conclusion which follows from our analysis is that websites, employed as tools in the teaching of foreign languages, serve as catalysts in promoting the students intercultural competences – the students’ sense of curiosity about other cultures is aroused, their uderstanding of other cultural identities becomes deeper and more comprehensive and, sometimes, sensibilities are even translated into actions which evince a highly developed intercultural awareness. As the comparison of results shows, the students have progressed remarkably from a relatively poor command of intercultural competences at the beginning of the project to significantly improved skills, a richer fund of intercultural knowledge and a better uderstanding of intercultural values by the project’s end.