

**RELIGIOUS -
FOR WHICH EUROPE?
EDUCATION**

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1967: Like all good stories, everything began very simply. For years the school had been organising youth camps. Since German was being studied as a second language, it was thought a good idea to organise this camp in Germany and include morning sessions for studying German. Annecy was twinned with Bayreuth, Wagner's city, and so it was to this town that we turned and in 1968 our first camp was held in Bavaria.

In 1969, the group that was staying in Germany was keen on sport. Football matches were organised and in this way contact was made with a secondary school in a small town called Pegnitz, some 30 kilometres from Bayreuth. Friendly links were established and annual meetings were established: the Germans coming over at Whitsun, and the French in the summer.

In 1972, a new stage was reached: holiday visits became school exchanges.

Since 1969 without a break, we have been exchanging our classes studying either German or French.

As the number of students studying German was increasing, which is no longer the case, a second agreement was signed with another secondary school 30 kilometres from the first in the town of Grafenberg. Both these schools are State schools.

In 1976 we began an exchange with the Catholic Spin di Romano school in Veneto for our students studying Italian.

In 1989, a first step was taken in the direction of Spain at Figueras.

1989: 20 years during which there was a continuous coming and going of exchange students between Pegnitz and Pringy and Pringy and Pegnitz. Overall, if our statistics are correct, 800 young Germans and 1,000 young French people took part at least once if not more in this sometimes difficult but always enriching and exciting experience of a different style of home and school life.

Teams from different schools understood that Europe could not be restricted to a big market and could not be built only on an economic basis. Our common history as Europeans was so full of hatred, love, vengeance, political and economic domination that first we had to create Europe in the heart before considering one of merchants and politi-

cians. This is what we understood together 20 years ago. Leaving the union of interests to the politicians and businessmen, we tried to work towards creating a union of hearts without an iron curtain or wall, without frontiers, so that no longer would one hear the words "foreigner, ausland", so un-Christian, but rather "friend" and even better "Brother", since we are all sons of the same Father who is in Heaven.

Aim of these exchanges

It is multiple:

- to make all our young people aware that our future community as Europeans cannot live without the ability to talk to one another, hence encourage learning other languages;
- create opportunities for first-hand experience of real life in other European countries;
- create closer links between the world of education and that of work;
- help our young students to see how cultures are nourished and enriched by contributions from different national cultures. This is I think what led us to widen the scope of our twinning and exchanges: **the triangle of friendship Pegnitz-Pringy-Spin di Romano** (Bassano) first of all, and then to Spain. A diversity of exchanges which demonstrate the cultural unity of Europe without wishing to deny the diversity of cultural traditions proper to each of our countries: **riches to be respected and safeguarded.**

I. In what do these exchanges consist?

For all our exchanges (Germany, Italy, France, Spain) the principle is the same:

1. From 8.0 am to 1.0 pm (because in Germany and Italy, school ends at 1.0 pm or 1.30 pm).

Lessons by the teachers from the host school: normally 4 or 5 sessions on the language studied (vocabulary, grammar, reading, conversation). The 2 or 3 other sessions, always run by the German or Italian teachers, are lessons in history, geography, science, music, sports, all given, of course, in the language studied.

2. From 1.0 pm or 2.0 pm: The young people go back to their host family (all stay with families). For them this is a way of discovering a new way of living, a new family. Afternoons are spent also exploring the area, visiting certain factories, and in sports activities.

Weekends (Saturday and Sunday) are spent with the family. Teachers are lodged with their colleagues. Sunday Mass.

3. The various town authorities in which the schools are located organise an official reception each year for these youngsters, thus showing them the interest and appreciation they have for these exchanges.

4. We point out that the school exchange with Grafenberg led to the twinning of Pringy with Grafenberg at a solemn signing ceremony 3 years ago.

II. Advantages and disadvantages

For the young people: learning languages

Progress is made during the two weeks spent abroad.

In France they have 3 hours of language study per week (5 to 6 in Germany). During the exchanges, they have 6 hours per day, that is, a minimum of 60 hours per week, the equivalent of 5 months in school. I am not including the hours spent with their exchange partner at home, during which they are obliged to speak German or Italian.

They understand the necessity of learning languages.

All are required to keep a written record of their stay. They get to know a different school, with its different way of working, its special timetable, its spacious and well equipped premises, especially in Germany.

Educational ideas: for the 2nd year now, we are experiencing having lessons lasting 45 minutes.

In Italy, they discover the difficulties experienced by Catholic schools to live and keep going, because they receive no help from either the State or the Church and depend entirely on the financial sacrifices of families and religious congregations.

Getting to know a family

When students arrive in Italy or Germany, there is a certain amount of apprehension.

What is my host family like? Will it be friendly? Will I manage to make myself understood? make friends? adapt?

This demands an effort from the students, because they have to adapt to a new style of life, to the food, to family customs.

Getting to know the area with its riches, its customs.

During this month of December 1989, the young people experienced history in the making. They met East Germans, saw the opening of the frontiers...

Discovering Christian life in Veneto and Bavaria. A prayer is said at the beginning of the school day, before meals. Students took part in prayer meetings, ecumenical services.

In Italy, family life is rediscovered, celebrations in which all take part...joy shared by the neighbourhood, joy that is noisy even, because in Italy children (bambini) are kings.

FOR THE SCHOOL

Extra work to organise these exchanges:

- their preparation
- contacting families
- replacing teachers accompanying the groups
- giving lessons to the students who come:

- * in January 1991: an extra class for the Italians,
- * in February: an extra class for the Germans from Pegnitz,
- * in May: an extra class for the Germans from Grafenberg.

Teachers have to be found who will give lessons free of charge or for a fee. This is not always easy.

Organisation of outings: skiing in winter, visits, etc...

FOR THE FAMILIES

Make families accept exchanges. It is now accepted that there is a language exchange in the 4th year of secondary school.

On the part of these families, an effort is called for:

- to take in the exchange partner without knowing his language,
- to make him fit in,
- to show him around the area.

This demands a certain openness on the part of the families!

It is not rare for families to keep up contact subsequently, inviting one another during the holidays.

FOR THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

It is the key factor in these exchanges.

German and Italian teachers:

- are lodged in the school
- eat with the community
- sometimes share their prayers and celebrations
- in any case, exchange views about teaching, catechesis.

Germany has on several occasions sent teachers of religion. These were occasions for very interesting and deep discussions.

With regard to Italy, members of the same Congregation accompany the students, and so community life is shared with all the different nuances and originality.

In Germany, it is an occasion for us to discover Protestant and ecumenical celebrations.

My German colleague, a Protestant, asked:

- * to read the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle
- * to learn about the Lasallian approach to education.

Last September, German and Italian teachers went home with copies of the booklet "Lasallian Educational Project".

At our own level we try to bring about what our ancestors were not able or did not want to: understanding among our countries.

Together, we have understood that Europe could not limit itself to being a big market, nor be built simply on an economic basis.

We have understood that our history as Europeans was too full of hatred, love, vengeance and political domination, and that we had to create Europe in the heart before considering one of merchants and politicians.

We try to work with young people and for them, in order to bring about a union of hearts,

- * so that they can come to know one another,
- * value one another,
- * love one another,

through mutual respect, not denying the diversity of cultural traditions proper to each, so as to avoid the destructive divisions of the past. **Europe is not behind us: it is ahead of us.**