



The Orava Project is a Sponsored Project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Projekt Orava je sponzorovaný Americkou agentúrou pre medzinárodný rozvoj (USAID)

Občianske združenie Orava pre demokraciu vo vzdelávaní Orava Association for Democratic Education

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Orava Project Summary

Orava Project: This project is a systemic school restructuring program addressing the educational community from the Ministry level to University teacher preparation programs, school administrators, basic school classroom teachers, parents and students. The project is now entering its fifth year in Slovakia though work began on the project in 1992. The intent is to enculturate schools with democratically based instructional practices. These instructional reforms are intended to introduce pedagogical practices which promote independent thinking, opinion formation, collaborative and cooperative work, integrated thinking, concepts of intellectual and personal responsibility, tolerance, respect for alternative ideas and opinions, and creative problem solving. These behaviors are thought to be essential cultural and community characteristics to develop and maintain a democracy. The heart of the project is affecting changes in classroom environment by reconfiguring the relationships between teachers and students, teachers and parents, teacher to teacher, teacher and administrator and student to student interactions.

Project Sponsors: The Orava Project is sponsored primarily by a grant from the United States Agency for International Development to the University of Northern Iowa.

Project Timetable and Funding Sources: USAID has provided funding for five years (1994-1999). The project began prior to 1994 with funds provided by the Iowa International Development foundation. Supporting funds have been provided by USIA and Soros Foundation-Slovakia. Continuation funds are being secured to carry the project forward to June, 2000.

Project Location: The Orava Project has three offices in Slovakia and one at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The main project office is located in Bratislava, with offices in Nitra and Dolný Kubín as well.

Project Staff: The project employs ten staff members in four locations. The Bratislava office is home to the project co-directors, Dr. Jeannie L. Steele and Dr. Kurtis Meredith and the executive assistant, Dr. Soňa Kikušová. That office also employs additional support

personnel. The Nitra office is home to two other American University faculty, Dr. Sally Beach and Dr. Mary Melvin, their assistant Klaudia Lorinczová and a secretary. The office in Dolný Kubín houses the Orava Program Coordinator, Marcela Maslová, classrooms for in-service programming and a resource library for teachers. The work of the project has also been carried out through the volunteer efforts of over 65 U. S. faculty from the University of Northern Iowa, other universities and educators from around the U. S.

Project Components: The project is a systemic school restructuring program consisting of numerous components. They include the following:

- Teacher in-service training
- Teacher pre-service training
- School/University partnerships
- Educational leadership
- Library and resource management
- Conflict resolution
- Civic Education
- Special education
- Early Childhood Education
- Parent/school relations

Project Legacy: The long term goal of the project is to affect lasting change in instructional practice and school management so students will be better prepared to live within a democratic society. To have lasting impact two things must happen. First, education institutions must adopt project content, procedures and programs, making them part of their normal practice. To that end a number of steps toward institutionalization have taken place. They include:

- developing eight core teacher leader groups prepared to deliver intensive in-service programs to practicing teachers throughout Slovakia. In fact core teacher leaders and school directors are presently involved in delivery of in-service programs throughout Slovakia. The number of educators directly impacted by the project is now impossible to count because of the number of in-services offered. It is known that more than 2000 teachers and 800 school directors have received Orava Project in-service programming.
- creating a permanent resource center and library in Dolný Kubín for Orava teachers.
- creating a school/university partnership between the Dolný Kubín Regional schools and Constantine the Philosopher University Pedagogical Faculty.
- institutionalizing the Orava Project teacher development curriculum into the Regional Methods Center teacher in-service program by securing Ministry of Education approval for the curriculum and for core teacher delivery of the program as a certificate program.
- creating the first school leadership and management department at Comenius University with Ministry approval of the Orava Project curriculum.
- creating a NGO to carry Orava Project work forward.
- creating the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project to expand the teacher education component to 17 other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The second step to lasting impact is building the capacity of Slovaks to carry the project forward. This is accomplished when people experience and recognize changes in their own beliefs, thinking and actions. This is more difficult to measure but the testimony of project participants suggests they are experiencing and recognizing changes in themselves through their participation in the project. A videotape of the project is available and contains the testimony of many project participants.

For additional information please visit our web site at: <http://www.uni.edu/coe/orava>