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Raising awareness of citizenship related competences in higher education: First steps and contributions from the working group

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The European Tuning Project (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003) has become a reference point for the implementation of an integrated European space in higher education. Tuning works with the concepts of learning outcomes (formulated by academics) and competences (these represent a combination of knowledge, understanding and skills developed during the process of learning by the student). After extensive research, the Tuning Project identified several generic competencies classified into three types:

- **a. Systemic competences**: abilities and skills concerning whole systems (combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge; prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences required).
- **b. Interpersonal competences**: individual abilities like social skills (social interaction and co-operation);
- **c. Instrumental competences**: cognitive abilities, methodological abilities, technological abilities and linguistic abilities.

Our working group focuses on three of these generic competencies, which are related to citizenship and interculturality: a) - Appreciation of diversity and multiculturality; b) - Ability to work in an international context; and c) - Understanding of cultures and customs of other countries.

The three competencies relate to psychological categories of **Attitudes/affective domain** (values, beliefs), **behavioural domain** (communication/interpersonal relations) and **cognitive domain** (information/knowledge). Furthermore, taken together they presuppose systemic, interpersonal and instrumental abilities and skills.

The first phase of the European Tuning Project included a large-scale consultation among graduates, employers and academics and it became clear that the above cultural competences are considered as less important, when compared with others, such as the capacity for analysis and synthesis. The focus of our working group will be with **raising** awareness of citizenship related competences in higher education.

Higher education in Europe and generic competencies related to citizenship and interculturality: are they less important?

The concept of competence means, as Chisholm (2005) puts it, 'the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a stable/recurring or changing situation. Two elements are crucial: applying what one knows and can do to a specific task or problem, and being able to transfer this ability between different situations.' Tuning therefore

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highlights the expected competences to be achieved by graduates in preparation for employment and citizenship.

The development of generic competences through education and training has become essential in increasingly diverse, uncertain and complex European societies and associated labour markets. It is evident that those who excel at their professional domains are those who combine specific expertise and know-how with abilities to relate to other people, to manage emotions, to anticipate and solve problems and to guide their decisions on an ethical basis (cf. Gardner, 1995; Gardner Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

Cultural or intercultural competence has to do with the ease with which one adapts and adjusts to different cultures and it requires that individuals demonstrate the capacity to engage in self-reflection and flexibility in thinking and acting. Cultural competence may therefore include the following capacities:

- To value diversity;
- To be sensitive to others and alternative ways of thinking;
- To have the capacity to manage the dynamics of difference and demonstrate;
- To be adaptable to different contexts including those characterised by cultural diversity;
- To be able to acquire cultural knowledge;
- To support and foster social and cultural equity.

Any European space of education and work clearly cannot become a reality if graduates don't understand and value their international peers' perspectives and cultural frameworks, and are unable to cooperate with each other because of misunderstandings, stereotypes or barriers to communication. It is vital that European higher education enables graduates to achieve these three generic competences.

The aim of our working group is to produce a series of guidelines useful to universities and academic personnel to support the development of the three cultural competences identified in the European Tuning Project. In so doing, we have designed three main strategies to achieve this goal:

- **a.** To review theoretical literature and research and to deduce, from principles any pedagogical implications that could be of use and for our purpose;
- **b.** To identify systematically good practices from other institutions and professionals (national or international contacts);
- **c.** To contact (informally and through questionnaires) four Erasmus Thematic networks working in different fields (History, Religious studies, Health Sciences and Chemistry).

The purpose of the remainder of the paper is to discuss some possible theoretical and analytical tools and to summarise some initial findings from our research into other thematic networks identifying how they are addressing cultural competences within their work.

Raising awareness of citizenship related competences: theory and context

Issues of diversity and multiculturalism are at the forefront of 'citizenship' agendas in both nation-states and in the European Union as a whole. Historically, European citizens have been socialised into narrow national and ethnic cultural frameworks that have been seen to be essential for securing social integration within defined territorial units. Processes of globalisation, European integration and immigration have challenged the dominance of national identities in favour of models of citizenship that emphasise cosmopolitanism and cultural reflexivity. If this is to be enhanced through education, then certain psychological processes have to be addressed and the normative frameworks on which new forms of citizenship can draw have to be identified. Here we discuss the relevance of the theory of social categorization and the context of human rights to our work.

Authors theorizing about social categorization believe that all human interaction occurs within a cultural context, all people are cultural and multicultural beings and all of our life experiences are perceived and shaped from within our own cultural perspectives (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Fiske et al., 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Social categorization predisposes the individual to certain biases and assumptions about themselves and others and means that we tend to include people in general group categories perceived as in-groups (groups of belonging) and out-groups (groups of comparison). Biases include exaggerating the differences between in-group and out-group, favouring, cooperating more easily with members of the group of belonging and trusting them more over the out-group members.

Research has shown that the traits associated with the category become the predominant aspect of the category, even when it is not confirmed by evidence (Kunda & Thagard, 1996) and especially when people are motivated to accept the stereotype as being true (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999). These can influence interpretations and judgments about behaviour of out-group members (Fiske, 1998). Consequently, unconscious categorizing, automatic biases, stereotyping and negative attitudes may lead to miscommunication, prejudice, conflict and distrust thus limiting and degrading relationships between people with different cultural backgrounds. Challenging unconscious processes of social categorisation within individuals is essential if a Europe based on diversity and multiculturalism is to thrive. Work on categorisation theories and research also demonstrates how inter-group processes can be optimised for all members through, for example, equalising statuses, emphasising cooperation over competition and perspective taking (Finlay and Stephen, 2000; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Hewstone et al. 2002; Pettigrew, 1998). This research indicates that there is the potential for educators to pursue inclusive pedagogies that promote cultural competence.

The promotion of cultural competence also requires a normative base that is not restricted to labour market efficiency. This can be found in the wider global discourses of human rights promoted by organisations such as the United Nations and NGOs. For example, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity reaffirms the conviction that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and to reject outright the theory of the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations. The first three articles of the declaration concern Identity, diversity and pluralism and they focus cultural diversity

as the common heritage of humanity (article 1), the passage from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism (article 2), and cultural diversity as a factor in development (article 3). Altogether, these articles state that 'cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature', that 'cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life' and that 'cultural diversity (...) is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence' (UNESCO, 2001). Thus, from this perspective cultural diversity can be seen to be a fundamental aspect of human rights, if not a human right in itself. While European integration began primarily as an economic project, over recent years the European Union has looked to these discourses of human rights and citizenship to legitimate and underpin its social, political and economic goals. A European identity may be emerging that 'evokes abstract and universalist principles of – democracy, progress, human rights and gender equality - without requiring the condition of a bounded cultural community' (Soysal 2002: 281).

The implication of the above discussion is that narrow and rigid cultural identities that reproduce discriminatory and exclusionary practices are far from an inevitable feature of human societies, and while the use of social categories may be fundamental to human relations these categories can be appropriated by individuals, reflected upon and redefined in positive and inclusive ways. This is more likely to be the case when international organisations such as the UN and the European Union challenge national exclusivity and promote normative frameworks based on cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of human rights.

Raising awareness of citizenship related competences: good practices in higher education

In this section, we outline ways in which cultural competences can be developed and enabled within higher education curriculum. We highlight four areas that could form the bases for future recommendations: challenging worldviews and cultural biases; training on cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication; curriculum and cultural knowledge; and institutional practices concerning internationalization.

Challenging worldviews and cultural biases

Self-awareness and appreciation of cultural, national and ethnic heritage may serve as a bridge in cross-cultural interactions, and building understanding, tolerance and respect (Hofstede, 1980; Locke, 1992; Triandis & Singelis, 1998). Students should be encouraged to analyse their own beliefs and attitudes and to challenge their worldviews as a first step towards promoting cultural competence. This would help them to realise that, once impressions are formed, they are often resistant to disconfirmation (Gilbert, 1998). Nevertheless, biases and stereotypes may be reduced with the help of several strategies, such as through building awareness of those attitudes and values (Devine, Plant, & Buswell, 2000; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000); effort and practice in changing the automatically favourable perceptions of in-group and negative perceptions of out-group (Hewstone et al., 2002); increasing contact with other groups (Pettigrew, 1998) particularly in conditions of equal status and generally by promoting perspective taking, empathy and racial/ethnic tolerance and trust (Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, Rosenblatt, & et al. 1992; Kramer, 1999).

Training on cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication

One of the goals of multicultural education is the inclusion of a plurality of perspectives in the curriculum. Banks (1989) and Bennett (1986) have developed some of the most well known models for inclusion of multicultural issues into formal education. Drawing upon Banks and McGee-Banks (1993) and Bennett (1990) we could summarize the purposes of multicultural education as follows:

- 1. Enhance higher-order thinking and problem solving skills;
- 2. Increase awareness and knowledge of the history, culture, and perspectives of ethnic and racial groups in one's country, and eventually, the world.
- 3. Enhance students' self-esteem, self-awareness, and identity.
- 4. Promote the valuing of cultural differences (and identifying commonalities) so that they are viewed in an egalitarian mode rather than in an inferior/superior mode.
- 5. Develop an understanding of the multicultural nation and interdependent world (adapted from Parla, 1994).

Banks (1994) stated, 'Effective educational programs should help students explore and clarify their own ethnic identities. To do this, such programs must recognize and reflect the complex ethnic identities and characteristics of the individual students in the classroom' (p. 223). Banks' (1994) stages of ethnicity illustrate the multidimensional characteristics of the development of ethnicity among individuals and can be used by students to assess their level of cultural and intercultural understanding. This six-stage model sets out a developmental process beginning with exclusive ideas of ethnic identity and negative attitudes towards others in the earlier stages and moving to a global perspective characterised by reflective and positive ethnic, national and global identifications. Parla (1994) has drawn upon this and other models to develop proposals for multicultural education suitable for use in teacher training.

Curriculum and cultural knowledge

A major limitation on enabling the acquisition of cultural competence in higher education is the organising and framing of the curriculum. The aim of higher education is to foster cultural knowledge yet knowledge is often organised selectively into disciplinary areas that place restrictions and boundaries on what is studied. Students may become narrowly and strategically focused on their particular disciplines and/or have few opportunities to pursue areas of study that would develop cultural competences. This could be addressed through introducing into programmes pathways and modules that allow students to study issues of culture, interculturality and citizenship.

Institutional practices concerning internationalization

Most higher education institutions in Europe are now valorising internationalization and making efforts to introduce it as a main sphere of their action. In this arena, some general good practices could be mentioned now (we'll describe them and other good examples later in our guidelines): students and staff International Mobility; Workshops on European integration and intercultural cooperation and communication; Internationalization at home (e.g., European weeks at the university); developing international projects with students from different countries cooperating; infusion at the curriculum level of cultural subjects regarding cultures, cultural paradigms, the psychological influence of culture.

Looked at together these four areas offer a useful framework for exploring and identifying best practice in relation to cultural competences.

Raising awareness of citizenship related competences: Erasmus Thematic networks study case

One of our working group tasks is to establish contacts with experts from four different discipline areas (History, Religious studies, Health Sciences and Chemistry) and their corresponding European Thematic Networks (TN). These Networks are CLIOH*net* (from the discipline of History, represents, for our purpose, the general domain of Arts and Humanities), ECTN3 (from the discipline of Chemistry, represents, for our purpose, the general domain of Science), Phoenixtn (from the discipline of Health and Social Welfare) and TRES-TN (Theology and Religious Studies). Below we summarise some of our initial findings from contacts, largely informal at this stage, with the different Networks.

CLIOHnet: Creating Links and Innovative Overviews to Enhance Historical Perspective in European Culture – The project may be summed up as follows:

- CLIOHnet is formed to address the task of bringing a critically founded historical perspective to bear on the challenges facing European society and education today.
- The Network utilises the remarkable opportunities created by the swift expansion of contact between diverse European cultural and educational traditions to bring a supranational, diachronic and comparative approach to the study and teaching of history.

- CLIOHnet works on a variety of levels. Five Task Forces address certain priority areas: gender and equal opportunities issues; racism and ethnicity; the use of ODL and ICT in achieving a new historical perspective; history teaching/learning at high school level; the broadening of the historiographical space to include Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries. There is a work group on history and humanities in scientific and technological curricula. Each Task Force is responsible for publicising the results of its work.
- CLIOHnet collaborates closely in the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Project, to set up common reference points, subject specific competences and level descriptors for history curricula. It collaborates in Tuning II, developing criteria for learning and teaching methodologies, and with Tuning-Latin America.
- CLIOHnet examines the status of history in Europe today, giving both an overview of the present situation and recommendations for action. (Taken from the **CLIOH***net* website, www.clioh.net)

In relation to the Tuning process, Cliohnet has identified a list of 30 subject specific skills and competences for History. The following are connected to the generic 'cultural' competences discussed in this paper:

- Awareness of and respect for points of view deriving from other national or cultural backgrounds (3);
- Ability to communicate orally in foreign languages using the terminology and techniques accepted in the historiographical profession (9);
- Ability to write in other languages using correctly the various types of historiographical writing (13);
- Knowledge of European history in a comparative perspective (20);
- Knowledge of world history (22). (Taken from the Tuning project website, http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu)

TRES Network. Teaching Religion in a Multicultural Europe – TRES Network meets new social expectations concerning a 'return of a religion to the social, political and individual life. TRES Network has a significant role in this area and promotes certain citizenship competences amongst students of theology and religious studies. It sets out three broad aims:

- To develop an understanding of a perspective on religion as an actor in Europe and the important of religious traditions in the EU;
- To develop tools for academic training, with particularly reference to students' Masters level programmes in Theological and Religious studies.
 - It is expected that students reflect on the role of religions in different societal contexts and sensitivity for problems arising from the encounter between different religious traditions and other ideological systems in a European context. In particular the students should develop strategies for how to teach about cultural and religious conflicts/tensions in religiously and culturally mixed groups.
- The third aim relates to the production of materials such as articles and web-based modules, with a particular focus on the Masters level programme.

These aims relate to three actions related to cultural competences:

<u>The first action</u> – focuses on the general question of how to teach religion in a multicultural Europe and how to prepare young people to think in a responsible way about their professional contribution to a well integrated, respectful and tolerant Europe. Fundamental in this action will be how to raise awareness of interpretation and understanding of religion in different national and international contexts.

<u>The second action</u> – refers to a need for critical reflection on the roles of states and other actors, religions included, within the social welfare systems and the different value systems they represent.

<u>The third action</u> – considers religion, in local as well as national contexts, as both the cause of conflicts and an important tool for conflict resolution.

The multidimensional approach to religion becomes necessary in order to understand the role of religion both as a major force for integration as well as the ideological reason for groups to become marginalized. The impact religions have on women and children, a foreigner in a society, other socially vulnerable or marginalized groups also becomes evident in this perspective.

In this action the TRES Network will connect to a curriculum development project on Religion in Conflict and Reconciliation (RaC), which is already funded within the Socrates programme. In this action TRES Network also wants to start collecting material on religious conflicts/tensions that occur in the European societies in order to build a virtual resource centre for educational purposes.

ECTN3. European Chemistry Thematic Network Association – ECTN3 'The New Generation of Chemists' project has two main general objectives:

- To provide tools and support to Higher Education Institutions to help meet the significant changes taking place as part of the Bologna process;
- To help provide Europe with more, and better trained, chemists.

The main activities and outputs planned to achieve these objectives are:

- To play a full part in the second phase of the 'Tuning Educational Structures in Europe' project, for which the main objectives are to develop further approaches regarding teaching, learning, assessment and performance and to link up the outcomes with quality assurance; to refine the methodology for measuring student workload; to test ECTS as a tool for curriculum design in chemistry.
- To determine the feasibility of creating an ECTS-based common framework for second-cycle degrees in specific areas of chemistry.
- To increase the interest in and understanding of science amongst schoolchildren by assessing the impact of current practices in links between schools and higher education establishments, and identifying and disseminating good practices and materials in this area.

• To identify best practices in student evaluation of university teachers. (Taken from the ECTN3 website, http://www.cpe.fr/ectn-assoc/)

Phoenixtn: Erasmus Thematic Network on Health and Social Welfare Policy - The Phoenix thematic network is primarily concerned with the interrelationship between people's health and social welfare policies and social change. It does this through publications, its website, conferences and seminars, working groups devoted to specific issues and educational programmes at Masters level. Here, we outline some of the initial ways in which Phoenixtn can be seen to be addressing the three competencies that form the focus of our paper.

Phoenixtn set up a working group concerned with 'Texts, Pedagogical Materials and Educational Political Recommendations for Ministers and Departments of Education of all EU members' (TPMEPR). This group has been particularly concerned with exploring the content and delivery of European degree courses that address public health and social welfare. The group has compared and compiled information from across universities in the European Union and found that most programmes have an international and comparative perspective on health and that there is collaboration between educators from 'European, Latin American, Asian and African countries, as well as the participation of students from different countries' (Report of academic year 2003-3). Much of the work of the group is focused on Masters and doctoral level and it is clearly evident that at this level much work is underway that relates to developing cultural competencies amongst students. A key recommendation and aim of the Phoenix project is to build on this work and to promote activities that build into HE programmes a strong European, international and comparative perspective. This includes the development by Phoenixtn of a European module on public health in Europe to be delivered across European universities.

Both researching and promoting cultural competences in the field of health and welfare is central to the work of Phoenixtn. This is best summed up by the response of a member of the TPMEPR working group to questionnaire to the group:

Our network is striving at competencies to understand the topic from an international comparative perspective, in which the first two items are basic elements [understanding of cultures and customs of other countries, appreciation of diversity and multiculturality]. Specifically, in a multi-cultural Europe of today with unequal opportunities and obstacles for groups that are underprivileged due to their situations as being "new citizens", understanding health and welfare problems from this perspective is an unavoidable tool. Since several programs we are personally participating in, plus others within the network, are international with students from the third world, the third ability [ability to work in an international context] is asked for by many students, who are looking for international careers in aid programs etc.

In the case of this Network, the trend then as this respondent makes clear is positive. The growing importance of cultural competences is a response within the public health field to a number of features of contemporary social change such as the increase in international and European academic and professional networks in the area of public health, the urgency of health and welfare issues within domestic arenas for immigrants

and 'new citizens' and the demands of students who want to work in international contexts. The work of Phoenixtn has been primarily focused on postgraduate education as it is at this level that students specialise in the areas that are the concern of this thematic network. It remains uncertain as to the extent to which such issues are finding their way into health programmes at the undergraduate level.

Further steps: the working group agenda

Our working group has faced some difficulties during the course of this year in terms of meeting up with each other to further our research and problems in contacting other Thematic Networks. Nevertheless, as this paper has demonstrated we have begun to identify a general framework and focus for future research into cultural competences. We plan to continue the literature review, refine concepts and to pursue contacts with the Networks. Our aim is to compare the practices of different discipline areas, to identify good practice and explore problems and limitations. This will lead us to producing guidelines and recommendations relevant to different disciplines and higher education in general.

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