

Integrating Intercultural Competence and Citizenship Education into Teacher Training: a Pilot Project

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ABSTRACT This paper describes a pilot project designed to help student teachers explore the ways in which their cultural beliefs are linked to wider social and institutional relationships. Through reflection and experiential learning, the student teachers were made aware of the fact that their beliefs have a direct effect on the way in which their students are “socialised” by their teaching processes. As a result of theoretical and empirical exploration, future teachers became more critically aware of their general perspectives about social issues, increased their intercultural competence and learnt teaching strategies which can eventually be transferred to teaching of citizenship. The project, which involved eight partners in six different countries, allowed 160 teacher trainees to undergo intensive teaching practice in a foreign country, while at the same time participating in a programme aimed at improving their intercultural competences and understanding of what it means to be a citizen in today’s world.

Introduction

The work of teachers is not easy. Teachers are, in the every day life of school, confronted by a diversity of students whose learning and welfare to a great extent are determined by the way teachers personally and professionally are able to ‘read’ the classroom, and the student identities within it. They are expected to manage diversity, act promptly in a variety of situations and must be able to solve a variety of conflict. (Arnesen, 2000:157)

Arnesen’s assertion that “the work of teachers is not easy” becomes even more evident when placed within the context of the different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups which make up the European Union and which provides the background upon which most European teachers work. It has been pointed out that educators now work with students who probably come from widely diverse cultural backgrounds, sometimes teaching in classrooms where there are more than twenty home languages (Gay, 2003; Brown & Davis, 2004). How teachers manage this diversity will have a direct influence upon the future citizens on a local, national and international level. As Arnesen has rightly claimed, the responsibilities teachers face

daily are daunting, especially when one pauses to reflect upon the fact that the act of teaching is

...part of the process of socialisation. Socialisation includes guidance and taking care of the individual, and having expectations of their behaviour using the formative influence of relationships (Minarovicova et al. 2004:8)

Unfortunately, many times teachers must face these responsibilities without the appropriate resources and experience, in both the professional and emotional sense (Lewis 1999, Villanueva & Gonzalo 2003) and this may influence their expectations of and attitudes towards their students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Woods, 1996).

The fact that teachers take part in the socialisation of their pupils, combined with the fact that their classrooms are often the nexus of many different cultures means that teachers must not only be competent in their field or specialization, they must also have what Alfred, Byram and Fleming (2003) have called “intercultural competence”. Intercultural competence can be understood as the necessary skills and attitudes to suspend one’s own beliefs about cultures (both own and other) while learning about general processes of societal and individual interaction in familiar and unfamiliar cultures. Alfred et al. have called this “critical cultural awareness”. They emphasise the need to be able to critically evaluate practices and products in one’s own culture as well as other cultures and countries. With these definitions in mind, this article will describe an international teacher training project aimed at promoting the project participants’ level of “critical cultural awareness”. A brief outline of the project will be provided, along with a discussion of how intercultural awareness is closely linked to the teaching of citizenship. Results stemming from the pilot project and how the project influenced participants’ intercultural competence as well as critical awareness of aspects of citizenship education will be examined.

Intercultural competence and citizenship education

The project, called Argonauts of Europe [1], was funded by the European Union with a Socrates-Comenius grant and ran from 2002-2005. The project aimed to help student teachers see how cultural beliefs are manifested in social practices, and how these beliefs may be perceived, constructed and negotiated in schools. The student teachers were also shown how to explore the ways in which these processes operate, and how all of these factors are linked to wider social and institutional relationships as a means to exploring what citizenship means to them. As a result of their personal and professional exploration, it was expected that the student teachers would become more critically aware of their general beliefs, increase their intercultural competence and learn ways to transmit this to their students so that they might be contribute to their students’ understanding of the values of European and global citizenship.

If intercultural competence is understood as the skills to be able to deal constructively with questions arising from cultural diversity, then the development of such skills will enable to the teacher to not only constructively deal with diversity, but also allow them to find approaches to teaching issues which have to do with diversity in society as a whole. Ideally, intercultural competence will help create a body of students who are informed and critically aware. Michael Byram (2003) has argued that “It is the role any teacher should have of developing in people a

willingness and an ability to be critical, critical in the proper sense - not to be negatively critical, but to be analytically critical, and to be reflective and think about their lives.”

Importantly, in the Argonaut project, the teacher trainees’ period of theoretical study about intercultural competencies was embedded within empirical practice teaching carried out in a country different from their own. In this way, the project was able to promote intercultural communication practice and reflection and help these teacher trainees prepare for teaching education for European citizenship, based on personally constructed knowledge and personal experience. The project’s principal focus was on combining theoretical work, self-reflection and full immersion in a different culture. This helped the student teachers reach a heightened awareness of the underlying values associated with particular beliefs they held about teaching (and learning), especially when dealing with diversity. As Barrow (1991) has demonstrated, when teachers’ beliefs are personalized through critical reflection, these beliefs can change, and the teacher can construct new understandings of his or her role in the entire teaching process.

Just as the capacity for critical reflection is necessary for intercultural competence, it is also a key element for responsible citizenship. According to the Council of Europe (2000), education for democratic citizenship must prepare men and women to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way their own destiny and that of their society. In order for people to live in a multicultural society knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and responsibly, they must practice critical cultural awareness of one’s own and others’ practices and values. In brief, citizenship education underlines active engagement in public life; intercultural skills for living in a multicultural society; and a commitment to social cohesion and solidarity. Inevitably, to achieve quality education for citizenship, teacher training should provide resources for achieving those goals. The pilot project outlined here was an endeavour to move in that direction.

Theoretical background of the project

Abt-Perkins and Gomez (1993) have suggested that teaching about cultural values must begin with self-inquiry. Teachers must first examine their fundamental values, attitudes, and belief systems and how this relates to their teaching in order to fully understand the impact of their role in their students’ socialisation. Indeed, there are numerous studies which demonstrate that giving teachers the opportunity to reflect on both their teaching roles as well as their teaching practices can help bring about permanent change (Beyer, 1984; Buchmann, 1984; Bullough, 1989; Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990; Feiman-Nemser & Flooden, 1986; Smyth, 1989; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984). Teachers’ styles and attitudes are rooted in experience and are developed through interactions (action/reaction) within this experience; these attitudes will gradually become well established within each individual. This implies that each person’s attitudes can be modified only by him or herself. Inevitably, this will occur only when he/she becomes aware of the fact that new postures would lead to improved practices for dealing with the surrounding world (in this case, the classroom) and is challenged to undergo an examination of his or her underlying value system.

But what exactly is meant by a teacher’s underlying value system? Goodman’s term of teacher “perspectives” (1988) can be useful here. In his study on pre-service teachers, Goodman noted that different students might express similar beliefs about teaching, yet the image associated with the expressions of their beliefs differed,

indicating that “beliefs” are not observable. According to Goodman, pre-service teachers held guiding images from past events which created intuitive screens. These screens provide a base for their underlying value system and will serve as filters for new information. By profiling teachers as knowing, meaning-making beings, it stands to follow that their “perspectives” will serve as a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves “as a basis for subsequent action ... a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and behaviour that interact continually” (Clark & Peterson, 1986:287).

Therefore, the principal aims of the project consisted of creating a theoretical and empirical educational programme that helped teacher trainees develop capacities and tools for a critical understanding of their perspectives and to allow them to critically observe their underlying value system or “screens” which guided their actions and reactions within the classroom. Of course, these aims are hardly new to educational programmes. As early as 1981, Trim stated that “personal and social development of the individual, capacity for co-operation and critical thinking, tolerance and understanding” should be included as goals for any educational curriculum.

What makes the pilot project described here unique is the fact that the programme developed an approach wherein teachers were encouraged to consider their own perspectives and conceptualisations of what they were teaching and who they were teaching within an international and empirical context. Research has shown that theoretical classes make little difference because both pre-service and in-service teachers are more likely to accept theoretical assertions only when it accords with their own perspectives (Dooly, 2005a.) It has also been shown that with more theoretical information, combined with empirical opportunities to reflect upon the way in which they categorize “diversity”, teacher trainees are more apt to innovate their way of thinking about diversity.

Thus, the project placed special emphasis on case studies which could be comparatively analysed by the trainees within an intercultural environment, combined with in-class observation, and reflective journals. All of this was carried out inside a framework of personal experience abroad. A report by UNESCO (1998) points out that quality in education depends on a multi-dimensional concept and mentions the importance of team work in intercultural contexts. Indubitably, the issue of teaching and acquiring intercultural competence is becoming a major concern in teacher education (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003), while at the same time, education for citizenship is becoming a major point of interest for primary and secondary schools. The aim of the project was to bring about what one might call ‘interculturalized education’, meaning that the student teachers achieved heightened critical understanding of connections among each educator’s self, school, home, and culture, and the world, thus helping them become better prepared to teach children about the world in which they will become citizens, at local, national and international levels.

Project outline

The pilot project was addressed to undergraduate student teachers from 8 different European countries. It was carried out during an intensive 8 week course wherein the teacher trainees were placed in primary schools outside of their own countries during 2 months, thus constructing multicultural working groups of approximately 10 student teachers in each country. This ensured that each group shared life experiences, academic work and school practice with people from different countries and cultures. These intensive courses were held twice during the

3 year project in all of the partner countries and involved a total of approximately 20 students per partner. As the project was developed in 8 different universities at the same time, the total amount of students involved was around 160.

The participants' course work was carried out in a blended learning environment which included a web based learning platform and experiential learning based on praxis. The course had four main pillars:

1) A blended learning course using case studies which students had to analyse, discuss and 'resolve' through group discussion. Some of these cases were related to the school environments of the students themselves and were used to promote individual and group reflection about different issues dealing with citizenship and teaching. Students had to do follow-up work in an e-portfolio.

2) A teaching period of 100 hours in a primary school in the host country.

3) A workshop on planning and management of trans-national projects designed to make the students aware of different European Union educational programmes, especially projects which dealt with teaching European citizenship.

4) An introductory course about the host country (developed locally in each partner country). This course focused on introducing the main social and cultural features of the host country, especially those addressed to help overcome stereotypes or misconceptions.

Results of the project

Proving the value of experience abroad is challenging to quantify although some methods of collecting data to measure intercultural competence and learning have been developed. Lukinsky (1990) has used personal diaries to measure intercultural competency while Dominice (1990) employed the use of a 'self-report' form. In a similar vein, Jacobson, et al (1999) and Ingulsrud, et al (2002) used a portfolio to measure intercultural competence. In the end, it was decided to combine individual artefacts (reflective journals), student e-portfolios and survey questionnaires as data-gathering tools. This produced both descriptive analysis as well as summative results of the impact of the project.

The questionnaire contained 12 open-ended questions. Everyone involved in the project was invited to fill in the questionnaire by downloading it from the project's website and then to send them to the project evaluator before 30 April 2005. Eighty-six people responded to the questionnaires, which is slightly more than half the total participants in the project. Of the trainees who answered the questionnaires, only four had finished their studies at the time of the survey. The questions for the teacher trainees were the following:

What is the most important thing you have learnt during the course?

What is the most important thing you have learnt about managing a school project (international) during your school practice?

What kind of projects did you come in contact with during your school practice?

What have you learnt about applying for a trans-national project?

What have you learnt about running a trans-national project?

In what way has the course inspired you to be involved in a trans-national project in the future?

To what extent do you think this course has had an influence on you as a future teacher?

What kind of skills does an international teacher need?

What kind of knowledge does an international teacher need?

What kind of attitude does an international teacher need?

What is needed to teach about world citizenship?

What more do you want to add?

The most common answer for question 1 was intercultural awareness. 93% mentioned intercultural awareness as the most important thing they have learnt from the course. One third of the respondents mentioned the importance of being open, patient, tolerant and accepting during discussions in a multicultural group. It can be assumed that the teacher trainees were referring to their own experience of discussion groups to resolve the “critical incident” cases during the course. Nonetheless, despite the overall acknowledgement of the importance of intercultural awareness, only a few of them (6) mentioned the importance of transmitting this knowledge to their future pupils, so it may be inferred that they were thinking more about their own intercultural awareness for teaching and not how these skills and knowledge might be transferred to their students in the future.

When the participants discussed the knowledge they have learnt from designing and implementing an international school project (questions 2, 3, 4 and 5) the most common answers referred to the importance of good planning, clear goals and motivating students. Several of them (38%) mentioned that teachers have a responsibility, through such projects, to sensitise their students to the dilemmas and circumstances concerning the world they will be citizens of. These answers resemble the aims of Citizenship Education for preparing people to live in a multicultural society so they live with diversity knowledgeably, sensibly, and with mutual understanding and solidarity (Council of Europe, 2000).

Questions six and seven dealt with the perceptions the student teachers had about the usefulness of such skills and whether they would be inclined to use them in the future. In answer to number six, 100% of the respondents indicated that they would indeed like to be involved in trans-national projects in the future. The course had given them ideas, contacts with future partners, along with the enthusiasm and courage to carry out such projects. Significantly, in their answers to this question, 27% of them mentioned the importance this would have for their future students by exposing them to different cultures and languages and helping the students construct their own models of their society.

The trainees’ line of reasoning – that their students will learn to be critically aware of different models of society is in line with Starkey’s (2003) summary of intercultural competencies. In it, he mentioned the readiness to relativize one’s own values, beliefs and behaviours and appreciate how others might perceive and interpret them as well as the knowledge of communities and their cultures, both in the learner’s own society and in other societies. These intercultural competencies are transferable to the knowledge and attitudes involved in the concept of “citizenship” – knowledge and understanding which allows an individual to participate and play an effective, informed role in society at all levels – locally, nationally and internationally.

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents stated that the experience itself had had a great impact on them. Some of them mentioned that they would now be more willing to work in another country, others said that they would definitely become involved in trans-national projects and some of them mentioned becoming involved in international work in their own countries, e.g. working in schools with immigrant pupils or becoming more involved in teaching citizenship education. This is important to the final evaluation of the project, since many of the teacher trainees came from countries where citizenship education is not an explicit part of the school curriculum and therefore some of them were not even aware of the subject before the project began.

As far as skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for an international teacher, the majority of the respondents mentioned communication as the most important skill (85%), knowledge of different cultures (91%) and open-mindedness was indicated by 94% of the trainees as the most important attitude for an international teacher. These are comparable answers to most definitions of intercultural competence. Significantly, the participants described an interculturally competent person as someone who shows affective, behavioural, and cognitive skills and knowledge to work alongside people from different backgrounds. This involves developing attitudes and ways of behaving which reflect flexibility and openness when dealing with others. These are some of the same values mentioned by Cogan and Derricott (2001) when they define the characteristics of effective citizens in the 21st century.

In regards to question 12 concerning world citizenship, the answers resembled the answers given for question 10. Knowledge of different cultures was indicated by all the respondents (100%) and open-mindedness was also signalled as important for teaching world citizenship (93%). One respondent stated that “for me, intercultural competencies are key for both the teacher and his students because they will know to develop themselves (sic) in a multicultural world”. One student remarked that there is a need for a raised awareness of school administration before education for citizenship can be aptly taught, indicating that the participant was aware of the restraints all teachers must face when trying to introduce new concepts to a school.

Kubow, Grossman and Ninomiya (1998) have suggested that there is an urgent need for a new educational framework to help face the many current challenges being faced by the world population. They suggest this might begin with the development of a “multidimensional citizenship” which acknowledges that “in an increasingly interconnected world where the issues affecting people’s lives are global and, hence cross-cultural in nature, the concept of citizenship becomes more complex” (116). Nonetheless, it is far from common that such a broad, interdisciplinary and international understanding of citizenship education is found in a national curriculum. The fact that one of the students was aware of such limitations by stating that the school must allow him to incorporate wider perspectives demonstrates that the student is aware of the limitations educators still face when they engage in teaching citizenship.

There is a pervasive vagueness about the goals of both citizenship education and globalisation which can be found in many school curriculum. How “global citizenship” is defined and implemented within school curriculum often varies (Reynolds, 1999) and does not usually make any reference to the problematic nature of the concepts of “citizenship” or “globalisation”. Similar vagueness about the concept was reflected in other participants’ answers to question 12. Fifty-four percent indicated that they were uncertain about what was needed to teach world citizenship; part of those stated that they felt that since globalisation was inevitable then education must be about facing those “consequences” or challenges. This resembles Zygmunt Bauman’s (in Smith, 1999) argument that most people feel they have little choice in the matter; indeed Smith has argued that local citizens are caught in the processes of globalisation, without any personal choice. This feeling of impotence may lead to disengagement and political inactivity. Arguably, a certain ambiguity between citizenship education on a local level and on a global level is detectable in the answers by the participants. The student teachers’ responses to the need for intercultural competencies was quite homogeneous – they all saw a need for understanding diversity in order to be able to react efficiently within a diverse classroom and many saw the benefits of international cooperation for educational

purposes; on the other hand, specific reasons for teaching world citizenship were missing in the answers for question 12. This may be due to a 'taken-for-grantedness' conceptualisation of children's apparent entry into global citizenship (their facile access to global news, media, entertainment is evident) while local challenges are seemingly much more real.

At the same time, it can be argued that aims of teaching world citizenship should be understanding conflict and conflict resolution brought about by the globalisation as well as a deeper understanding of human rights and responsibilities in circumstances affected by globalisation. This can be carried out by encouraging students to question values, both locally and in different parts of the world. Several of the answers to question 12 were focused on the practicalities of teaching world citizenship such as the need for international exchanges between students and the use of new technologies to build a sense of global community (37%). By indicating that they now saw a need for cross-cultural teaching through the very tools offered by globalisation indicates far-reaching notions for citizenship education. The students did not see it as a localised, notion to be 'consumed' and then forgotten, world citizenship education requires looking beyond the school and community boundaries and looking towards partnerships around the world. Ideally, these ideas of global partnership could serve as a teaching resource for exploring global economic, political, social and cultural 'interconnectivity'. This, in turn, is another resource for exploring conflict and conflict resolution brought about by the very 'interconnectivity' they are able to enjoy and which is a fruit of globalisation. And inevitably, these apparent contradictions of globalisation can best be examined by teachers and students who have critical cultural awareness.

Discussion of some aspects from the qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis of the artefacts such as journals and portfolios indicated parallel results to the questionnaire responses. The qualitative data compiled for this research consisted of audio-recordings of the group discussions (which were then transcribed) and student journals and portfolios. Significantly, at the beginning of the two-month period, most of the students indicated that they felt that dealing with diversity in the classroom was "difficult".

Helen [2] : you have an ... if you have so many different languages and cultures you have to make a different structure in your classroom... it's not like if you have only people from the from the same country same

Lori: yeah

[...]

Maud: what's the first impressions if you come into a class and these children are sitting there? what do you think is your first impression? (pointing to pictures of school children whose physical appearance is quite varied in physical features and clothing).

Cindy: difficult

Julie: difficult (Group workshop, 4 March 2004)

This association between what has been interpreted as a classroom with a high level of immigrants (stated earlier on in the dialogue) and problems and difficulties in that particular classroom is directly related to notions the student teachers already held about diversity in the classroom (Dooley, 2005b). Arguably, these perspectives are constructed through exposure to professional discourse in teacher education, in

statistics, and the media. (For a more in depth study of the socially structured character of ideology through discourse, see Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Bourdieu, 1982; Heller, 1995; Verschueren, 1995a; Verschueren, 1995b; Woolard, 1985). This social discourse of immigration discourse, according to Pihl (1998) provides teachers with their language to describe ethnic and cultural relationships in society, and inevitably within the classroom. The link that is created between “different” or “diversity”, and potential for “problems” and “difficulties” is based on numerous reports on “problems” that schools have with immigrants. And as van Dijk has argued, the media has only helped exacerbate that apparent link (1993).

In other words, the teacher trainees’ perspectives and frames of reference which came from both personal experience and their professional training (policy documents, teacher handbooks, media) helped create the conceptual lens through which they perceived the school “reality”. This is evidenced by what another dialogue pair discusses below. These two girls go from an hypothesis of what might happen inside the culturally diverse classroom to real events in their own lives.

Sandra: it is quite difficult [they are] allowed to use hats inside the classroom or scarves or anything like that I mean ... a girl from another culture comes there and then the teacher... because it's their culture I think

Marga: mm

Sandra: ...she is allowed to use a scarf so you have to explain it to the other children because you can't force her to be like others, her own culture so it's not an easy thing to do it's very difficult because then of course the other children ... but I think it's very good for the children; they know about the different cultures and what people are in a... that they are all different (Group workshop, 4 March, 2004)

Their first journal entries (during week 1 of their intensive practice) also indicated that the teacher trainees began the eight week period with stereotypes of the countries and cultures where they would be teaching, based on previously constructed perceptions which they held before arriving to that country.

...I think that the people in Spain are more relaxed than the people in the Netherlands and that is cultural, I think. Because in the Netherlands it is very important to have a good job and earn a lot of money for lot of people. In the Netherlands people are always in time, and they don't like it when people are coming too late. (Karina, Czech Republic, 15 February 2004)

However, during the time spent in the eight-week empirical course, the participants began to recognise the need to re-think certain attitudes and perspectives.

So don't ever give up before really experiencing things. And try to avoid stereotyping, because we are all anyway different from each other even inside the cultures. In my practise I found many similarities and also differences, but in the end I think that we even shouldn't be that similar, because what would be there then to learn from each others. It would be much more boring if all the colours would be gone. (Sandra, Finland, 18 March 2004)

The next extract nicely exemplifies the growing awareness of the participants after weekly personal journals, case studies, teaching practice, journal entries and face-to-face group discussions. The entry highlights the way in which the participant gradually became more aware of her own tendency “to generalise” about cultural and social aspects.

I can see that the first time you said don't generalize I thought yes easy to say but hard to be aware of. The second time I thought again is everybody generalizing? Than later on we where talking and Linda said don't generalize. I thought mmmm.. And the last discussion I heard myself saying Don't generalize please!! So one thing I learned for sure is Don't generalize please! (Carol Anne, Netherlands, 5 April 2004)

The teacher trainees also realised the need for teaching their students about the world beyond their local environment. One trainee was quite shocked by the lack of general knowledge of her students about anything beyond their village (Sabadell, Spain).

Together with the project I was using a map of Europe, to show exactly where the countries are, what are the capitals and what are the names in English. The pupils didn't even know the names of the continents, so I used the globe as well and tried to explain that Iraq and Iran, for example, are not part of Europe but of Asia. Some of them also go to Tunisia or Morocco on holidays but they think they are still in Europe. Also to distinguish between continent, country and city was quite difficult for them sometimes. The best answer to the question: "What is the capital of Spain?" was: "Sabadell!" (Lucille, Czech Republic, 13 March 2004)

This same teacher trainee soon discovered a teaching strategy of finding similarities between cultures to make the students understand that people were not so different, after all.

When I told one of the English teachers that we have a legendary dragon in Brno, she asked me to tell the story in English ... and we talked with the children not only about this legend but also about other customs, such as upcoming Easter. We also found out that this legend is similar to the one of Sant Jordi here in Catalonia.... (Lucille, Czech Republic, 28 March 2004)

Perhaps one of the most important discoveries the teacher trainees made is the fact that diversity in the classroom means more resources for both the teacher and the students. By the end of the eight week intensive practice teaching, the participants had moved from the idea that diversity means difficulties in the classroom, to the concept of diversity as an enriching factor for everyone involved.

Terry: yeah and also it's good because I think they all have a different background so it's a richness for the teacher and the pupils also that have so many kinds of cultures and things like...

Lucille: so they can learn from each other about the others' culture

Terry: mm

Lucille: so if you can come to the class and say ok today Maria is the most important child and she will talk about her country and habits and Rashid about a different country and then it could motivate other pupils... (Group workshop, 14 April 2004)

Conclusion

As future teachers, these trainees have acknowledged their own stereotyping prevalent in their value systems, faced up to those tendencies and moved beyond them to devise teaching strategies based on increasing their students' awareness and understanding of the world they live in. Intercultural competence requires being able to relativize one's own beliefs, and ideologies, just as the teacher trainees have done. They have also demonstrated the capacity to provide benchmarks for their own students to help them learn how to make evaluative judgements based on explicit criteria which can come from exploring global situations. The goals of both intercultural competence and education for citizenship require the ability to examine beliefs and behaviours about social identities, to be sensitive to different identities and values and to be able to interact effectively with people of diverse social and cultural groups. With those goals in mind, the teacher trainees in this project provide positive examples of both future citizens and future educators of citizens.

Essentialist notions about cultures and identity are largely created through many different sources of knowledge and information, and often provide a basis for teachers to define and interpret 'classroom reality'. There are different available models for explanations of reality which not only influence teachers, but also the students they are teaching. By highlighting how these personal and professional discourses combine to create 'common-sense-notions' (Gee, 1990), the future teachers who participated in this project were allowed to see how these notions are embedded in their understanding of 'classroom reality' and in their understanding of the world they live in. The participants in the project examined their fundamental values, attitudes, and belief systems in order to fully understand the impact their teaching role had in the students' socialisation.

Arguably, by carrying out this reflection within an international context, this has in turn led to an increase in the participants' cultural critical awareness (Alfred, et al., 2003) and encouraging an on-going transformative process of the participants' internal mental system. It stands to reason that, as future educators, they can and will prepare their own students to become interculturally competent global citizens. This same optimism is echoed by a student teacher's final journal entry:

At the end of the day, the children are the same everywhere – just as we adults are under all this cultural cover we have... But the children have not built the fence or cover yet (...) The children are less prejudiced than adults, and I think if this is enhanced, they will remain open-minded and interested throughout their lives. Children are our future European – and Global – citizens! (Jana, Finland, 15 April, 2004)

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NOTES

- [1] The project (ARGONAUTS of EUROPE) was addressed to future school teachers and was coordinated by the Hogeschool van Educatie in Utrecht (NL), The Pedagogische Akademie des Bundes in Vienna (AT), the Masaryk University in Brno (CZ), the Universities of Linköping and Karlstad in Sweden and the Teachers Training College in Szcztyno (PO) and Facultat de Ciències de l'Educació, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona were the associated members.
- [2] Names of the participants have been changed

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