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What is your view of “European awareness” or “European identity”?

“If we don’t change ourselves, we won’t be able to change the world.” said a small French boy enrolled in a workshop of philosophy for children somewhere in France. How close to the truth! ¹

Let me start by saying that living together (not side by side) in Europe is enriching on condition we know *who we are* and *who the others are*. Therefore, fostering our own identity is a precondition for fostering *European collective identity* which is *a sum of individual identities*. This has been made possible in EU projects.

Over the last 20 years through our involvement in EU projects in our own right we have experienced the meaning of Robert Schumann’s words “Europe will be built by concrete achievements creating a de facto solidarity.” EU projects have helped us understand who we are and who the others are, what our similarities and enriching dissimilarities are.

Like all identities (personal/individual or social/collective) the European identity/awareness is not clear. It can be objective, of course, or subjective. Therefore, searching for ways to build up European identity, we should think of both.

Moreover, it has to be remembered that identity is about being included.² Therefore *fostering European identity is associated with inclusion processes* of groups at the edge of

¹ Les cercles de petits philosophes. YouTube. Available on the 20th April, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxiTrWO4yoY>

²Political changes deprive individuals of their identity. Rapid exclusion of Jews from economic, institutional, social life in the years before the second world war deprived Jews of their identity. They were no longer German Jews, many have become apatrids. The need to be included intensified their Judaism.

society like older people, women, refugees, migrants, generations, etc. European Union has done a lot in this respect and has produced an impact on the national level.

To go on, I have a tendency to compare European awareness with social fairness that is simultaneously present and nurtured on different levels; distributive, economic, cultural and symbolic levels. If we, as Europeans, wanted to consolidate our European identity, we should all continue having fair access to economic sources. On cultural and symbolic level, we should go on acquiring new bits of European identity drawing equally upon most different national or even local sources of European culture, etc. Moreover, everything possible should be done as to alleviate prejudices as well as negative or positive social stereotypes about countries, their inhabitants, minorities, religions, etc. But we should also be aware of the conflict of cultures, languages, traditions that continue existing within European identity, a matter that needs constant attention.

Now, European identity is not only about nostalgia of the urban Europe of the 19th century referenced by music, literature, science, psychology, etc. produced mostly by famous European Jews. Europe is much more and European identity is associated with much more.

In our fragmented societies *interconnectivity* is of an overwhelming importance.

So, the sense of community and European awareness will be strengthened by going on "*building networks for mutual transactions*" argues Karl Deutsch.

For classifying a country and creating its *objective identity* one uses human and physical geographical features but also its legal developments, social, cultural, artistic, economic, infrastructural, scientific, technological developments and much more but also its tangible and intangible heritage, traditions and their influence of the power relationships. Human rights, safety, freedom, peace, solidarity, social cohesion - presently proclaimed as European values - are valuable values and concepts, but do they build European awareness well enough? I believe that building European awareness all these and many other features are to be taken into account.

What does (social) "good practice" mean to you?

As I see it, good practice is an embodiment of both disciplinary and experiential knowledge and skills united to perform tasks. The above mentioned dimensions *get validated by their use in real professional, personal or social life situations.*

First, a good practice is a valuable example to follow, an inspiring model to look up, methods to transpose. It shows what can be done, and above all, how it can be done. It is inspiring and can be adapted to local conditions.

Next, a good practice means attaining the level of knowledge and skills and adopting attitudes needed for successful completion of tasks and according to *professional standards.*

Finally, speaking of *social good practices*, combining educational and social activities within communities, it seems to me, that adult educators and other professionals have to create learning and working situations to match with the needs, wishes, expectations of the learners; in this case learners become also a kind of activists, sociologists, politicians.

Groups of learners are more self-directed, individual group members more *co-operative* and independent.

More learner focused *methods*, a combination of *learning locations*, are wished for in good social practices. The methods are dictated by the topic, knowledge and skills to be gained, goals to attain, the need to build up a community: discussion, dialogue/social debate, reciprocal, mutual, collaborative, exploratory learning, learning by doing, project work are recommended. Methods are applicable on condition they contribute to the learners' learning, constructing new knowledge and doing together.

Using such methods adult educators learn about what and also how their learners have learned. *Adult educators act as learners in their own right!* They may be the main source of knowledge, but the learners themselves are a good source of knowledge as well.

Each member of the learning group needs to perform an act of teaching! Adult learners are not aware of the knowledge they have gained from informal learning about phenomena and events. Adult educators make it possible for them to express their knowledge which adult

educators integrate into the educational programme guiding their learners' thinking in the right direction.

What is critical thinking?

It does not matter what you
cover in education, it is important what
you discover. (Noam Chomsky)

“Philosophy can help changing the world.” “Philosophy can help seeing the world in a different way and seeing it together.” “Occasionally, I ask myself why our world is like this. There must be a good reason for that.” Frédéric Lenoir, a French philosopher and writer, worked with children from seven to ten years of age in the workshops of philosophy he conducted in two primary schools throughout the school year. Children *can* face existential questions, are able to shape arguments and discuss. They can become small philosophers, developing collective intelligence. ³

Critical thinking shapes both individual and collective intelligence and it needs time and practice. Obviously we think all the time, each of us, but how often do we think about how we think? It needs knowledge, skills and imagination to see connections, to think. Critical thinking reveals how somebody else reflects and how they see the world. It gives the clues to reconstruct how somebody else thinks and then evaluate the quality and credibility of their thinking to see if their ideas are sound. It helps looking both into our own thinking and thinking of others.

To be communicative, critical thinking needs to be structured. Luckily structuring the thinking processes can be learned! Once the structure is mastered, thinking can become more free and critical. Critical thinking is about deconstructing and constructing thoughts, making assumptions, conclusions.

³ Les cercles de petits philosophes. YouTube. Available on the 20th April, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxiTrWO4yoY>

Since critical thinking has to do with *thinking processes* it might be useful to know how to proceed, and how to gain textual competence. First we might want to describe what a text is all about and who the author of the written or oral text is. We might evaluate the contents, the topic of the text /film/piece of music, etc. Then, the strengths of the text are evaluated, then its weaknesses and the level of trustfulness. Theses and arguments are observed, thought of. This procedure is used to inform the readers of a written text, etc. or listeners of an oral text of its value. How? Through explanation, interpretation and analysis.

Critical thinking enables individuals to make their own *value judgments*. In today's society where fake news are produced, where populism rises, where abuse has become obvious, where obedient consumers are needed, where climate changes require changing attitudes, critical thinking is essential for each individual and community. I would go further saying both critical thinking and knowledge are important.

Critical thinking is a *complex-thinking process*. It is about being able to compare, judge, evaluate, control? One is able of thinking critically on condition one has acquired minimal reading, writing, cognitive, numeric and cultural competencies enabling one to build further one's thinking and learning processes and consequently changing one's behavior.

Why is critical thinking necessary? It is necessary

- to question reality;
- not to depend blindly on others;
- not to believe what others say, without having experienced what they argue;
- to be aware of one's rights,
- not to make one's life too miserable;
- not to be subordinated to superstitions and
- not to nurture hopes that are not plausible;
- to defend oneself against social stereotypes and prejudices, using one's reasoning;
- to escape from confidence tricks, attractiveness of charlatanism;

- to control one's health, and destiny, one's freedom and opinions, one's consciousness;
- to use one's freedom to express oneself;
- to have one's own opinions that can enrich, cure, save. (Nicolas de Condorcet).

Critical thinking means cultivating one's own thinking processes, avoiding clichés and simple truths. Moreover, it means *asking questions to understand*, to build one's knowledge on many and plausible data, to use analogy as a thinking process, to cultivate divergent thinking and not being a conformist thinker.

How can we foster “openness for Europe” with methods and projects

Over years, amazingly enough, Erasmus+ projects have somehow diminished the innovative spirit of partners. In most projects initial research is skipped. Most projects include the so-called *Methodology* (the term is confusing) which in fact is *Conceptual or philosophical background* of the intellectual outcomes; the so-called Handbook or Course Manual, On-line course accompanied by a Guide for educators. There are 2-5 transnational meetings with no more visits to institutions organised by the host. There are multiplying events, there is dissemination and exploitation, there are webinars and a web page. This kind of structure of activities and project outcomes is perhaps easier to follow by evaluators. Next, too many-project proposals are written by agencies. The result are unimaginative rationales, projects that are less useful, evaluation that do not evaluate what really needs to be evaluated. Skilled project implementation follows the same structure. Thus, project proposal depends very much on mere craftsman's skills, strangling the innovative spirit of project partners.

If we want to develop “openness for Europe” there should be:
 more flexibility in building project proposals, careful attention should be given to building the rationale. More trust (less evaluation of the process), better quality evaluation! A better division of work among partners according to their best abilities.

Methods

Methods used in projects are mostly convenient if they are eclectic enough and if they open up deliberative democratic procedures, gearing common work towards the agreed goals.

Methods include *discussion*, *demonstration*, co-operative and reciprocal learning, community building activities, taking into account the learning styles like kinesthetic learning.

World café, when well-integrated in the programme, can yield very good results. Using computer applications and film as a learning method or as an outcome to which audiences are introduced is a good example of learning by doing. Pictures might be used more often. Methods should build the learning communities on both micro and macro European levels.

Experiential learning and learning on different locations is well received.

Moodle platform can be useful, but due to the fragmentation of the programme it is not convenient for dyslexics. Pictures and stories and advertisements representing European countries and Europe as a whole have proven to be appropriate.

Some room in the project should be spared for additional activities and contents discovered in the course of the project.

Transnational meetings should be devoted less to management and financial issues but more to the topic of the project, which used to be the case in the past!

Film festivals give Europe most visibility, much more than written texts. Street education and activities are also very visible.

Besides methods contents are important for opening to Europe. Authentic materials, more data about the profile of the country.