

mission demands that it prepare students to contribute to the larger good. Meanwhile, students are driven to higher education in large part to obtain rewarding jobs when they graduate. How can colleges and universities negotiate these competing commitments? Are they in fact competing, or is this "simply" an impression created by societies that seem to find it difficult to consider multiple purposes and to keep sustained attention?

The forum on "Converging Competences: Diversity, Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy" explored where there are convergences across goals for higher education - learning and research, diversity literacies, civic-mindedness, and preparation for work in a fast-changing, global environment. We proposed that rather than competing, these four commitments can actually strengthen and illuminate one another. The forum highlighted examples of how higher education has begun to

understand and align these converging competences, while also providing the structures, teaching methods, curricula, and opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in real world situations. We aimed to explore how converging competences may be developed through curricula and non-curricular programs, governance, and other opportunities.



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## Constructing a reference framework for competences geared to enhancing diversity

In 2008, the cities of Graz, Nicosia, Sofia and Tallinn hosted the debates organised by the Council of Europe under the second phase of its project "Policies and practices for teaching socio-cultural diversity".

Given the main aim of this second phase, which was to devise a reference frame of competences for young teachers with an eye to enhancing diversity at school, the project group, chaired by Professor Anne Lise Arnesen (Østfold University College, Faculty of Education, Norway), decided to involve a number of universities and teacher training centres in this work by means of four thematic Consultation Tables.

The first Consultation Table was held on 21 and 22 February 2008 at the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (Austria) on the theme of "Language diversity and new teachers' competences". This event had the support of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture as well



*The Council of Europe project group "Policies and practices for teaching socio-cultural diversity". From left to right : Villano Qirazi, Lia Tsitsuashvili, Elisabeth Furch, Bernard Dumont, Anne-Lise Arnesen, Sityka Chavdarova Kostova, Julie Allan, Angelos Vallianatos et Karmen Trasberg.*

as the *Pädagogischen Hochschulen* of Carinthia and Vienna. National co-ordination was ensured by the Austrian member of the Council of Europe project group, Professor Elisabeth Furch (*Pädagogische Hochschule, Vienna*).

Discussions centred on the Austrian experience in the field of teacher education in diversity, and a number of inno-

vative initiatives were examined, eg *The SCOLION on-line teacher training platform*, *TRIO – a trilingual magazine for primary schoolchildren*, *Teaching indigenous minorities in Burgenland*, and *The surprises of language diversity in Austrian classrooms – the results of research*.

This Consultation Table provided the Council of Europe project group with an

opportunity to submit its work on devising the reference frame of competences on diversity for consideration to various field workers, including Austrian teachers, trainers and researchers. The participants paid particular attention to the descriptions of competences relating to developing positive communication strategies in the classroom.

The second Consultation Table took place in Nicosia (Cyprus) on 5 and 6 June 2008, attended by teachers and trainers from Cyprus and Greece, who discussed the theme of "Social inclusion and teachers' competence in education for diversity". This event had the support of the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, with particular backing from the Cypriot Pedagogical Institute, while the co-ordination work was directed by the Cypriot member of the Council of Europe project group, Dr Pavlina Hadjithiodoulou-Loizidou (Pedagogical Institute, Nicosia).

An examination of the current situation of diversity and social inclusion in Cyprus was followed by the presentation of a series of case studies and examples of best practice, including the case study on *The Phaneromeni schools in Nicosia*, which operate in an education priority zone; research projects by Greek and Cypriot academics on the role of teachers' competences on identity, diversity and social inclusion; the studies entitled "Deconstructing television representations as a resource for intercultural education and Intercultural education week: an experimental approach to diversity in initial teacher training".

The participants also had an opportunity to discuss the competences proposed by the Council of Europe's project group, including those relating to the construction of knowledge in the field of socio-cultural diversity and intercultural communication and awareness competences. They stressed that competences should not be considered as a miracle solution for addressing, managing and

promoting diversity, but should also be tailored to the social and historical context and to questions of social justice, equality and success for *all* the pupils in a given school.

After the discussions, specific recommendations were drawn up for the Council of Europe project group concerning the initial structure of the reference frame of competences. The group also decided to launch an *On-line Co-operation Platform* so that all the participants could become involved in the work of finalising the reference frame.

"Ethnic and cultural diversity and teachers' competences" was the theme of the third Consultation Table, which took place from 25 to 27 September 2008 in Sofia (Bulgaria), with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Faculty of Pedagogy of the St Kliment Ohridski University. The work was co-ordinated at the national level by Associate Professor Siyka Chavdarova-Kostova (Sofia University, Faculty of Pedagogy, Head of Chair "Theory of Education"), the Bulgarian member of the Council of Europe project group.

During the discussions it was stressed that effective pedagogical preparation of teachers for working in multicultural school environments largely depended on optimum co-operation among the universities and the public authorities. Competences on diversity and the principles and concepts should be part of the national strategy and the reforms launched in the education sector.

The discussions were enriched with the results of the case studies on "Teacher training in ethnic and cultural diversity – the cases of the Shumen University and the University of the South-West and Students' active role in conducting practical work experience in multicultural environments during their university careers". In the group discussions, the emphasis was placed on the need for more practical work by future teachers

in schools that represent the different types of diversity.

The series of Consultation Tables closed in Tallinn (Estonia) with the fourth Table, which took place on 15 and 16 October 2008, on the theme "Diversity and induction for new teachers", with the support of the Ministry of Education and the University of Tartu. The work was co-ordinated at the national level by Prof. Karmen Trasberg (University of Tartu, Head of Department of Foreign Languages).

This last Consultation Table enabled the experts and project group members to consider questions arising out of the practical application of competences during induction periods for new teachers, in the light of the results obtained from special programmes implemented in a number of Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland) and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

Drawing the conclusions from this last Table, Prof. Julie Allan (University of Stirling, Scotland, UK) stressed that the most important lesson learnt by the project group from its work in 2008 was the added value that could be derived from pooling the experience of experts, teachers, trainers and researchers from all the participating countries; it was by combining their different approaches to the problems that the group had been able to build up a reference frame of competences, which it hoped would be implemented in initial teacher training programmes in a good number of European countries.



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