

# **SYNTHESI**

## **Synergetic new thesis for the European Simera**

Mirca Ognisanti

### **Abstract in English**

SYNTHESI is a European Project led by Greece which has two fundamental aims: the promotion of an active European Citizenship and the strengthen of intercultural Communication.

The Project aimed to address these aims by offering tools and identifying strategies to support the development of a self and social awareness. The Project carried out different activities for teachers (seminars, research and investigations on teaching methods, drama representation) and for students (musical performances and a musical stage for dance students); every country partner has worked in one or more of these actions with the purpose of producing changes in schools and educational institutions as the Ministries of Education towards a promotion of the awareness as a toll for the development of the whole multicultural society.

### **Abstract (in italiano)**

SYNTHESI è un progetto europeo promosso dalla Grecia e ha due obiettivi fondamentali: la promozione di una cittadinanza europea attiva ed il rinforzo della comunicazione interculturale. Il progetto intende richiamare questi obiettivi offrendo gli strumenti ed identificando le strategie per sostenere lo sviluppo di un autoconsapevolezza sociale. Il progetto ha proposto diverse attività per gli insegnanti (seminari, ricerca ed indagini sui metodi d'istruzione, rappresentazioni teatrali) e per gli allievi (performance musicali e stage di musica per gli allievi dei corsi di ballo); ogni partner ha lavorato in una o più di queste attività con lo scopo di indurre cambiamenti nelle scuole e negli istituti scolastici come i Ministeri di formazione, per una promozione della consapevolezza come elemento necessario per lo sviluppo della società multiculturale.

## **1. THE PROJECT**

### **1.1 Description of the project**

#### *Objectives*

The Project promotes an innovative profile for the teacher based on an interdisciplinary approach with emphasis on the areas of Education, Art, Culture.

SYNTHESI considers the teacher as a counsellor, communicator and a reflective practitioner/researcher. Since the learning process is considered as the result of an experience, SYNTHESI refers to the experiential learning as the domain to be developed, especially in multicultural contexts. The project is based on a dialectic approach between the individual/society relation, as well as on theory/practice link.

#### *Activities*

As a transnational Project, SYNTHESI envisaged the responsibility of partner in carrying out the different activities:

a) The Greek Co-ordinator promoted and organised 2 seminars attended by 127 teachers of secondary education and teachers trainers. The first seminar was held in Evangelistria (Voiotia region, Greece) and teachers came from three different prefectures (district). The second seminar was held in Athens.

This 2 seminars aimed at offering teachers the preparation for the work envisaged by the Project and to get them acknowledged about the Project aims. The Coordinator wrote an article and presented the works of the teachers, which came out from two seminars in a teachers' newspaper (for details see the website [www.irre.veneto.it/europe/synthesi](http://www.irre.veneto.it/europe/synthesi)).

b) The Spanish partner (Ministry of Education) was charged of the organization and implementation of two seminars for teachers of Secondary Education and teacher educators and an investigations on teaching methodologies, in particularly referring to the self-awareness about the role of the teacher in a multicultural context.

c) The English partner (Southport College) was responsible for piloting a European Awareness programme (based on three units) starting with the broader theme of increasing interest in and awareness on issues as Europe and identities amongst young people; also, the English partner was asked to implement vocational drama students in a video that has been produced to let other Europeans understanding the life in a multicultural city as Sheffield and their attitude of English and non-English students towards Europe. Southport College set up a musical, titled *Weatherlands*, with vocational dance students on intercultural identity theme, with contributions from media students in Ireland.

d) The Spanish Ministry of Education carried out an investigation on teacher in-service training programmes and methodologies and their aims for the development of a self-aware and intercultural teaching.

e) The Italian partner (IRRE – *Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa* VENETO and the Liceo Artistico Statale di Venezia) – promoted the dissemination of the project throughout the setting up of a website, where reflections and experiences are reported in cooperation with all the partners.

During the first year the Project aimed at building a new profile of the teacher throughout the organisation of three seminars and a theatre performance played at the Delhi theatre. In February 2000 a Meeting was held in Venice. During this meeting the partners presented to each other their work, agreed about the work to be carried out for the rest of the first year of the project as well as about the activities and the budget for the next two years.

The second year was addressed to build the “Heuristic Teachers’ Society”: this association is meant at reflecting and disseminating the debate on the role of the teacher in promoting self-awareness as a way to get to social awareness. It focuses on the responsibility of teachers and on the need to understand the importance and the impact of teaching in the construction of a social awareness. The society does not deal specifically with intercultural education: intercultural dialogue and education is transversal to the work of the teachers members.

In the second year the website of the Project was set up: [www.irre.veneto.it/europe/synthesi](http://www.irre.veneto.it/europe/synthesi).

The third year was finalised to the completion and production of the *Heuristic Teachers’ Periodical*. Furthermore, a final Conference was held at the conclusion of the Project.

## **1.2 Time, structure and steps of the project**

The starting point of the project is the recognition on the **key role of the educator** in the social context and the contribution that he/she can offer to the personal development of the citizens. Therefore SYNTHESI tries to promote systematically and effectively a general up-grading of the teachers and educators . The formulation

of educational aims does not allow to the teacher to take part in the process of determination of ways and methods. The teacher is usually conceived as the final executor of the education process. The implication of this under-utilisation of the teacher and of its non-involvement is the failing in taking responsibilities for the educational project and a mechanically teaching with no consideration of consequences and impact of the quality itself. This is the result of a technocratic approach that produces passivity and lack of awareness among teachers. As a result, the role of educator is down graded and he/she will not feel responsible for the impact of his/her work.

In this context, the Project tried to offer teachers tools and occasion to up grade their awareness about their role.

### **1.3 Place and context**

This project is focused on training of teachers in the schools partners. The Project assumes a general situation of teaching in the countries involved. The Project coordinator, Mrs. Kosmidou-Hardy, makes a realistic picture of teachers. She affirms that the teacher has reached a general pessimism about education and the capability to intervene, therefore he/she often choose the easiest way. This leads to refuse innovative experimentations, that are seen difficult to be implemented. The common needs of educational systems involved in the Project is for an *heuristic teacher*, who sees things feasible, is informed on theoretical issues related to the construction of the self, can read situations and events critically.

### **1.4 Target**

The project is intended to reach all the citizens involved in the educational process; in particular it addresses mainly to teachers and educators as direct beneficiaries who are asked to develop their own personal and professional competencies.

### **1.5 Methodology**

The Project is based on a particular approach, which consider the learning process and communication as experiences to be represented and disseminated throughout performances. Critical reading is a useful methods used for the deconstruction and reconstruction of alternative texts. The partners were asked to present the result of their final work (see Activities) of the first year throughout a theatre performance held at Dehli theatre, attended by more than 20 people. The Performance has been chosen as the right method to communicate the basic aims and parameters of the Project, thanks to the immediate effect of the message performed. In this Project Intercultural Communication was the main focus, together with the promotion of a European citizenship. The Project was aimed at investigating the way in which communication practices are used in the context of a cultural group and between culturally different groups or communities, with the aim of influencing the development of its members' personal identity, which in turn, influences their perceptions, memory and the way in which they build experiences. Investigation of performances used through rituals of everyday life (e.g. in storytelling, myths, anecdotes, discussions, games, teaching, etc.), could bring to the revelation of hidden social conventions, as well as assumptions and practices of dominant ideology, which lead to the conservation and reproduction of identities and social institutions.

The investigation approach promoted the development of innovatory communication practices, which, in turn, could lead to the development of new rituals and performance and, finally, to the creation of new methods.

The project methodology was based on the acknowledgment of the necessary deconstruction and reconstruction of the role and the influence played by public institutions in the definition of traditional teaching asset. This methodological approach is based on the idea that institutions and educational services, as the school, can become places where culturally different groups of people gather in order to confront and interact with public culture and dominant ideology. This is the basic description of how the SYNTHESI Project intends to promote a different view of power relations in education and, in particular, in multicultural contexts.

The double approach of the Project tries to develop both sides of awareness: the “critical self” from one side and the “social awareness”, from the other side: therefore the training through experience (see for instance the drama, musical, or performance activities listed above) become instruments to make the teachers conscious of self-identity. The Project coordinator affirms in if the teachers are helped in observing and reflecting upon the self, the practice and social phenomena of their contexts, it will be easier for them to explore the consequences of teaching on society, and to adopt an active and responsible role.

### **1.6 Authors, Funding and Networks**

The Project was funded by European Commission – Comenius 3.1.

## **2. HINTS FOR AN EVALUATION**

### **2.1. Strengths**

#### *2.1.1 The organisation’s perspective*

The Seminars were successfully attended by teachers, who received information on the Project. They have been trained on the main issues (European citizenship and Intercultural Communication). They contributed to established an enthusiastic climate. In many occasion they showed interest and satisfaction to the Greek staff and to other partners.

The Second day of the first seminar, many teachers came without invitation. They appreciated logs they received, and they stated that logs helped them to reflect on the issues of the seminar. They could express their opinion and evaluate the initiative through the logs. Also teachers’ trainers, advisers and head Teachers asked to continue the cooperation of the Project. The project get grade A from European Commission assessment.

#### *2.1.2 Interculture map perspective*

The innovative and constructive element of this project is related to the dense philosophical and methodological approach, that is a distinctive characteristic if compared to other Project where the implementation and operational aspect is dominant in respect of theoretical assumptions. This allow to practice to experiment what is not yet proved both at legislative both at academics level. Thanks to these important contents, the practice can be adopted as a workshop, a laboratory to be assumed and taken as an example from policy makers and researchers.

### **2.2. Critical points**

#### *2.2.1 The organisation’s perspective*

The documents written on the Project by the coordinator or by the scientific referee are definitively enthusiastic about this Project. No strong critics come out from the reflections draft after the end of the Project. Maybe this is due to the awareness of a

high level of complexity the Project had to cope with since the starting, as if the complexity was part of the Project itself and not as an external disturbing variable.

### *2.2.2 Interculture map perspective*

The project presents a relevant effort in understanding the process in teaching, both from communication and relationship with the self and with the society. Nevertheless, even if intercultural communication is stated as one of the pillar of the Project, no effect on students is investigated from the intercultural point of view. It seems as if the Project starts and ends in the field of teacher, without a direct impact on students. Certainly the influence on the learners is a result that can be measured later on, being the construction of an heuristic teacher a long term process.

## **2.3. Conclusion: what is “exportable” in the project**

### *2.3.1 The organisation’s perspective*

For the Project Coordinator, Chrysoula Kosmidou-Hardy, the exportation of main contents of Synthesi has been a topical issue since the start up of the Project. During the first year, in particular during the meeting held in Venice in February 2000, the Partners developed a draft proposal that has been submitted in the context of COMENIUS 1 (as it was scheduled in the Application form submitted for the first year of SYNTHESI) so that the work developed in the context of SYNTHESI can be piloted and disseminated at school level through appropriate strategies and methodology. Four schools - one from each country participating in SYNTHESI – have been involved with Spain - (Melilla) as the coordinating country. The title of this Comenius 1 project is: *European citizenship through the perspective of arts.*

### *2.3.2 Interculture map perspective*

#### *Themes*

This Project has a complex theoretical base that must be previously understood and shared, in order to afford an successful exportation of the main themes, that are listed below:

- Reflection on the role of teacher in multicultural societies
- Developing and writing of educational material in order to enrich the debate on the role of teaching, by promoting and stimulating the contributions of every teacher attending, throughout experiential training (i.e.: using of drama).
- Empowerment of the teachers

#### *Methodology*

The project has showed a good level of consciousness on the process of awareness building that is at the basis of a real intercultural society that cannot be built if no individual awareness is built as a preliminary and important step. Actually, there isn't a direct link to the impact in terms of intercultural education. In the coordinator's view this project is meant at putting the bricks that are necessary to the construction of an intercultural society, because the change of our society must pass from the individual self consciousness. In this process the teachers is the facilitator, because he/she can help the students to raise awareness on themselves, and on power relations in societies. The Project is characterised by a certain level of complexity, because it is meant at producing virtuous effects both on teachers and on students, which are expected to understand and to observe how their identity is shaped by the external context in order to raise skills and opportunities for the society change. In multicultural societies this work can be consider very important because it does not

intervene on (multi)cultural phenomena but, preliminarily, on the process of identity construction.

### **3. OTHER COMMENTS**

The Project Coordinator, Chrysoula Kosmidou-Hardy, has wrote an high number of report on the issue of heuristic teaching.

Herewith, a report that has sent by the project Coordinator, that explain the role of teaching and the meaning of heuristic model.

### **4. LINKS**

[http://www.provincia.venezia.it/lartis/synthesi/frame\\_phi.htm](http://www.provincia.venezia.it/lartis/synthesi/frame_phi.htm)

website of the Project set up by the Italian partner