TOOLS TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION – THE HE4u2 PROJECT

HE4u2 Consortium[1]

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade Europe has faced an increasing flow of migrants arriving from regions affected by war, conflict or disaster in search of an opportunity and a better life. In 2015, the photograph of the young child dead on the beach shocked thousands of people – finally the World paid attention to what was happening.

The forced mobility of all these individuals arriving to Europe compelled our societies to respond and to include these newcomers in our current systems in the best way possible. We are continuing to learn how best to facilitate this process. These changes in our society require attention at different levels - not every professional is prepared or has access to tools that help him/her to deal with it.

There is a clear need for the education system to respond, including providing training for teachers working with migrant or ethnic minority students, to reform the delivery of support for these learners, integrating at the same time an intercultural dimension for all learners in the classrooms in an inclusive approach.

The HE4u2 project tried to respond to the above context by developing an approach to the intercultural dimension of existing curricula, developing a set of guidelines and a generic CPD course for staff to understand how cultural diversity can enhance their work, and a set of policy recommendations focusing on the curricula and the teachers of adults in HE, who often provide access for disadvantaged groups.

HOW HAS CULTURAL DIVERSITY BEEN TACKLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION UP TO NOW?

In order to develop new tools, the project partnership researched how cultural diversity had been approached and implemented in HEIs until that moment. A total of 37 interesting practices already in place and 82 pieces of literature on the topic were collected and analysed. The collected resources were categorised according to two different factors:

- Structural conditions
- The HE experience

and depending on the different consequences in terms of:

- Outcomes for individuals, HEIs and the society as a whole

Figure 1 overleaf plots these points and their dimensions in a concise way.

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[1] This article is a summary of the work completed by the HE4u2 project. The individuals from the HE4u2 consortium who have worked in this project are (in alphabetical order): **José Pedro AMORIM, Amandine BERNAL, Sofia CASTANHEIRA PAIS, Françoise DE VIRON, Josephine FINN, Camilla FITZSIMONS, Bernie GRUMMELL, Timo HALTTUNEN, Beate HÖRR, Amelia LOPES, Kia LUNDQVIST, Isabel MENEZES, Tiago NEVES, Agnes RASCHAUER, Katharina RESCH, Carme ROYO, Alfredo SOEIRO, Iris THIMM, Francesca URAS, Leena VANHAKYLA, Georgios ZARIFIS.**
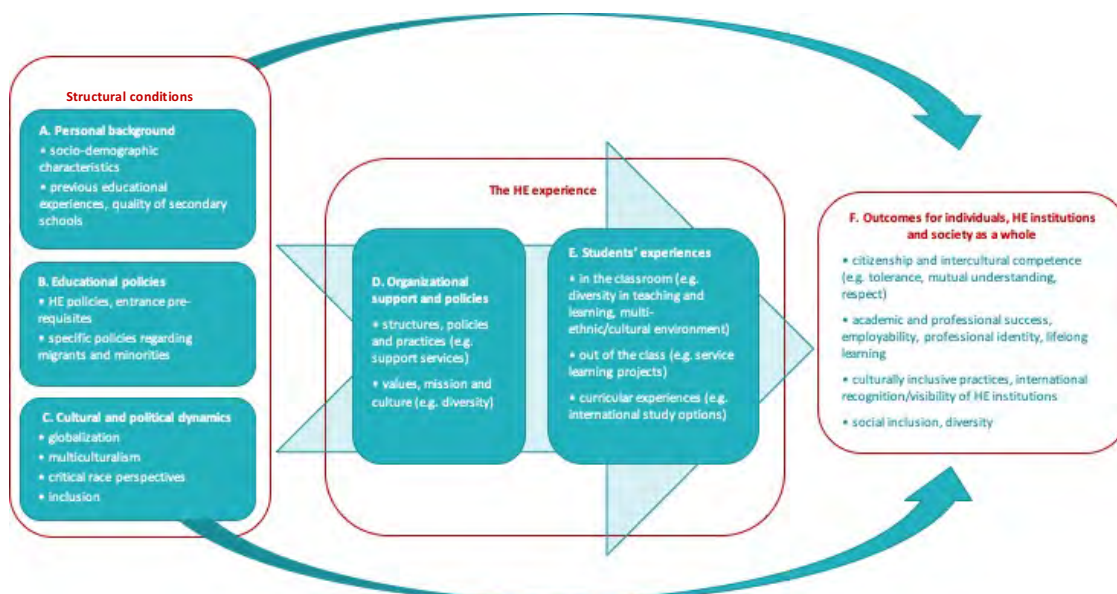
Figure 1: Menezes, I, Lopes, A, Azevedo, CN, Amorim, JP, Pais, SC & Neves, T (2016). Literature review. In Menezes, I, Lopes, A, Amorim, JP, Neves, T, Pais, SC & Soeiro, A, on behalf of the HE4u2 consortium (Ed.), WP1 Stocktaking, Final report.

The analysis of the collected material draws the attention to some key points:

- More research about ethnic minority students and their experiences, concerns and goals is needed which gives voice to their experiences and include them as change-makers
- The dissemination of useful information and tools is imperative, for example about job opportunities, but also access to manuals or tutorials that promote knowledge and competences relevant for students, teachers, staff and other stakeholders on issues of diversity and migration
- Language and intercultural training is very useful
- Intervention activities such as peer mentoring, intercultural get together events, support groups, multidisciplinary and multicultural study groups, etc. are essentially necessary and should be built in the institutional general strategy. These should be developed and informed by representatives from all key participants in HE
- More policies need to be adopted, for example developing systemic and institutional inclusive strategies for HE, awarding of additional scholarships, combination of financial support with language training, implementation of recognition of prior learning and skills development

WHAT DO THE STUDENTS THINK? LEARNING ABOUT THE REAL FEELINGS AND WELCOMING IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The consortium approached students identified as "migrants or from ethnic minority background" by a survey. A total of 323 contributions across European HEIs were collected. The most relevant points highlighted by many of these students are:

- These students do not want to be omitted but they do not want to be put in the spotlight: they want to be part of the group
  - *"I am not represented in any place"*
  - *"I feel like the lecturers and modules content keeps talking about the 'Third World', and every disease or disasters seems to be coming from there"*

- o *"In lecture scripts and curricula events are being looked at and analysed with a Eurocentric view, for example the conquest of America where the mass murder or native literature is not being dealt with. It is not about my cultural background, but it affects everyone else."*
- o *"Merely based on where I come from (X), people allow themselves to assume they know who I am … What is challenging is the expectation of me (as a mere example of an "other") to accommodate their presuppositions about myself."*
- o *"They tend to consider all Asians as a group, even though they distinguish Europeans from different countries."*

- They are often identified by their origin – but they want to belong; they do not want to feel "exotic"
  - o *"I've learned to go through it as a "NATIONAL of the country" even if I do not feel like one. So far I have had no inclusiveness difficulties."*
  - o *"for me was the feeling of belonging to XXX University without constantly highlighting my ethnic background, diversity and being exotic"*

Regarding how to include students and represent their diversity in the classroom, these students gave their opinion about ways of improving current practices:

- o *"Consult with all the ethnic minority groups in the institution and draw up a road map on how best to integrate their culture and ethnic programme into the main stream curriculum in order to address any short falls"*
- o *"A deep analysis of racism from the perspective of black people directly …"*
- o *"Lessons could also be structured with compulsory group work that mandates working with at least one "minority" member."*
- o *"Only with more people living together and expressing the tensions of everyday life it would be possible to better know what to do. Without differences, it's hard to think about the changes."*
- o *"This inclusiveness is not a matter of a university program, it is a matter of heart, of resident's hospitality. It is not a value that can theorize, (…) [these] are behaviours, attitudes, and ways of treating the foreigner more than we treat ourselves, even if we retain in our culture that to treat well the other"*
- o *"… each person was able to tell about their own cultural background. The teacher as well as the students were very open towards the cultural diversity of all participants, each was understanding of and interested in the others. That made me feel welcome."*

TOOLS TO HELP HIGHER EDUCATION STAFF TO UNDERSTAND AND BENEFIT FROM CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Two main tools have been developed by HE4u2 specifically for HE members of staff: a 'Set of Guidelines' and a 'Generic prototype Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course', adaptable to the needs of each institution or individual.

Set of Guidelines

All the feedback collected from learners in the survey and the materials found during the desk research done in the first phase of the project enabled the consortium to write a set of guidelines for HE staff. Figure 2 overleaf shows the 3 reflection levels that HE staff should tackle in order to develop their current intercultural learning environments and improve their current methods and approaches:
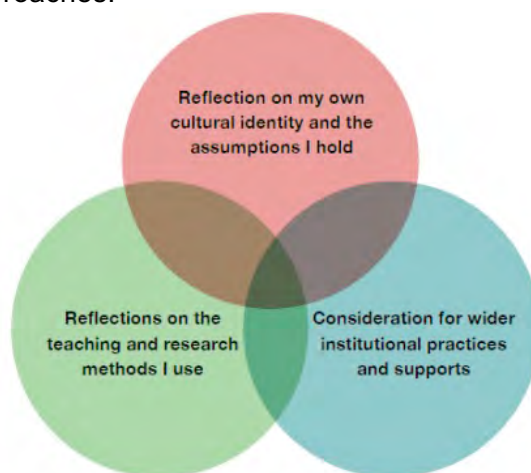

Figure 2: Fitzsimons C., Finn J., Grummell B., on behalf of the HE4u2 consortium (Ed.) (2017): Creating intercultural learning environments – Guidelines for staff within Higher Education Institutions

- <u>Self-level</u>: *"reflection on own cultural identity and assumptions"*
- <u>Teaching-level</u>: *"use of language; participatory teaching methods AND curricular change - inclusion of relevant information about ethnic and racial groups, question racialized stereotyping, include literature and research beyond the Global North, reflect diversity"*
- <u>Institutional-level</u>: *"institutional reforms and adoption of policies that value integration and confront racism and discrimination, recognize international qualifications and prior learning AND foster the creation of spaces where migrants and ethnic background students feel represented, recognized and listened to"*

Generic prototype CPD course

The HE4u2 generic prototype Continuing Professional Development Course (CPDC) aims at giving the reader insights and ideas how to organise staff training with the aim of promoting inclusive learning and teaching in European higher education institutions. The course structure can be adapted to any institutional, regional or national environment.

Readers can find in the course details of the dimensions of cultural inclusive teaching (see Figure 3) as well as the pedagogical tools and processes recommended in the generic course (see Figure 4).

The main principles underpinning the HE4u2 generic course are:

- awareness of one's own cultural background and interest for other cultures, as well as cultural diversity
- shift of cultural frames of reference
- change in attitude and propositions towards e.g. minorities

- use of the cultural heritages, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students as resources to facilitate and enrich the learning process of all students

The course intends to develop intercultural competences in learning and teaching which often omits, underrepresents or distorts discriminated groups, stereotypes cultures and is language-biased.

It also offers teaching and learning strategies to promote active and collaborative learning, reflective practice, dialogue within the group and with the teachers and increase sense of inclusiveness.

The dimensions covered in the Course are those indicated in the image below:
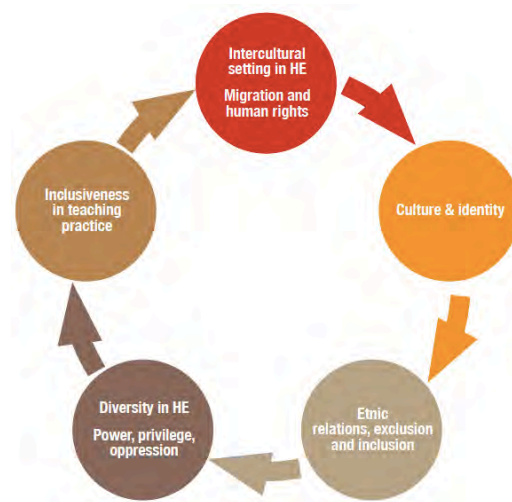

Figure 3: Dimensions of Culturally Inclusive Teaching (Acquah, Halttunen, Lundqvist 2017)

The teaching and learning strategies proposed include tools (e.g. learning journal), methods (teacher reflective practice) and theoretical models (experiential learning) that have been identified as effective both through the research and the pilot phase of the course. Because teaching and learning are context bound, these pedagogical strategies should be modified to fit the local context.
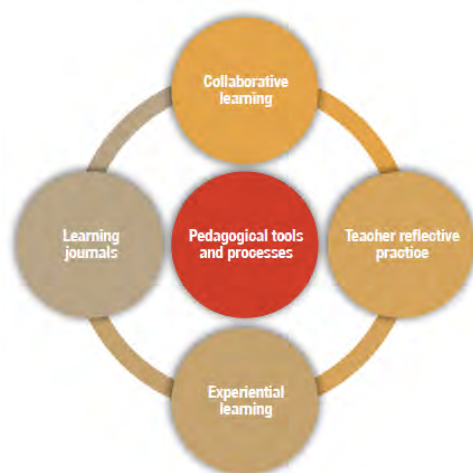
Figure 4: Pedagogical tools and processes of the Generic Course (Lundqvist, Halttunen, Acquah, 2017)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO PLAN AN INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

The policy work carried out in the course of the project, which has included public online and face-to-face consultations with external stakeholders, has brought about ten HE4u2 policy recommendations organised around three areas of action:

- Promoting the integration of cultural diversity in HE
- The integration of cultural diversity in itself at HE level
- The sustainability of these actions in HE environments

Each of the 10 recommendations can be addressed to European policy makers, national policy makers or/and HE institutional leaders.

No	Recommendations	EU	Nation	HEI
Promoting the integration of cultural diversity into HE				
1	Celebrate human diversity	✓	✓	✓
2	Commit to active diversity management	✓	✓	✓
Integrating cultural diversity into HE				
3	Promote open access to and success in HE	✓	✓	✓
4	Integrate diversity into curricula			✓
5	Train diversity skills (pedagogical approaches)			✓
6	Collaborate to solve intercultural questions	✓		✓
Sustainability for integration of cultural diversity into HE				
7	Ensure sustainability	✓	✓	✓
8	Embed diversity in strategy papers and quality plans			✓
9	Provide incentives and (financial) resources	✓	✓	✓
10	Monitor the impact of diversity policy	✓	✓	✓

Figure 5: Bernal Gonzalez, A; de Viron, F; Souto Lopez, M; on behalf of the HE4u2 consortium (Ed.) (2018): Policy recommendations on better integrating cultural diversity in Higher Education - Full report

Valuing the learner as a person, regardless of his/her employability potential or the economic value of the studies and merging the university's social responsibility and diversity management in order to positively influencing the development of an intercultural society are the fundamental points of **promoting the integration of cultural diversity in HE**.

The **integration of cultural diversity** can be fulfilled by promoting recognition of migrant learners' professional background and academic qualifications (even from countries outside the Bologna Process), by integrating diversity into existing curricula, by training staff and developing their teaching methods, or by enabling and encouraging collaborations with other organisations and external actors.

Sustainability actions for these innovative approaches are needed at different levels, but institutions should start by embedding diversity in their strategy papers and quality plans, offering more resources to organisations that make an effort to improve their policies and monitoring how diversity policy is positively impacting in our society at many different levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The inclusion of cultural diversity at the end is a matter of the heart. As "advanced" society we should want to make our society wider, opener, more inclusive and respectful. To learn from different cultures and take the best from each of them should be our wish. Knowing different cultures can only make us stronger and wiser. However, we observe that:

- for various social and political reasons, migrants and ethnic minority students **still experience a strong structural disadvantages in terms of access and progression in HE –** resulting in weakening the intercultural learning climate for ALL students
- there is a need to recognise that **racism and discrimination are still huge problems** in HEIs that must be actively fought
- there is a **need for a dialogical perspective BUT beware of the illusion of symmetry** – there are significant asymmetries of power between the diverse groups that occupy HEI: 'diversity within diversity' (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, nationality…)

For all the above reasons, we must be aware that a lot of work still has to be done for our society to fully progress in this area. The active involvement (or enablement) of our policy makers (at different levels) is one of the important keys for success.

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Outputs of the HE4u2 project http://he4u2.eucen.eu/outputs/

Presentations during the HE4u2 Final Symposium in Barcelona, 15 November 2018
http://autumn2018seminar.eucen.eu/he4u2/