An Investigation into Intercultural Communication Issues in High School Curricula in Italy, Slovenia and Turkey

Neva Čebron
Faculty of Humanities
University of Primorska, Slovenia

Contact: neva.cebron@fhs.upr.si

Abstract

How can acquisition of intercultural competence be implemented into courses across the high school curriculum? The aim of this paper is to showcase the approaches enhancing intercultural learning as promoted by the EU founding documents and implemented within the PERMIT project. To this end, the paper is organised in four sections. The first section introduces the main tenets promoted by the project. The second section examines the theoretical framework for activities within the PERMIT project, introducing the basic concepts and strategies proposed by the cross-cultural approach and the intercultural approach, so as to prove the relevance of these theories in achieving the main goals of the project. A special, third section briefly presents the tools developed for the purpose of the project, along with the facets of intercultural education that they were meant to enhance, but is mainly devoted to commenting on the data gathered from Italian, Slovene and Turkish secondary students with questionnaires, which consequently informed various activities within teacher training workshops. The final section outlines the main outcomes of the project, namely, a set of cross-curricular teaching materials intended for the development of intercultural awareness and gives an overall assessment of PERMIT project's achievements.

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One of the main tenets of the EU integration process is the respect for cultural and linguistic diversity of the Member States. As the Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states, "the Union contributes to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels." Article 151 elaborates on this integration principle by asserting that "the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore." Moreover, the White Paper on Intercultural Learning focuses on the important role that intercultural dialogue must play in this regard, since "[i]t allows us to prevent ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides. It enables us to move forward together, to deal with our different identities constructively and democratically on the basis of shared universal values."

These principles were at the forefront of our attention in designing the activities and planning their outcomes within the PERMIT project (Promote Education and Reciprocal Understanding through Multicultural Integrated Teaching), which was sponsored by the EU initiative *Promotion of the Civil Society Dialogue Between the European Union and Turkey*. Drawing on the cultural, linguistic, religious and humanist inheritance of Italy, Slovenia, and Turkey, we decided to contribute to the development of quality intercultural education by encouraging teachers of various subjects in high schools to develop teaching materials through cooperation with practitioners from the other two countries. Thus, we hoped to contribute to the preservation and to the development of common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the three countries by implementing the aforementioned EU founding principles in

the classroom practices of a number of teachers and, consequently, reach a considerable number of their students.

The importance of intercultural dialogue among those forming or aspiring to join the European Union underpinned all the activities of the PERMIT project. On the one hand, the aim of the project was to promote the best practices in raising intercultural awareness that had been developed in the participating tertiary institutions. On the other hand, the goal was to give an opportunity to teachers and students in secondary education from the three participating countries to establish new international ties that would prompt mutual interest into respective cultures and facilitate gaining firsthand experience, knowledge, and understanding of these diverse cultural environments.

A brief examination of the goals specified in the project proposal yields a clear set of core objectives that are geared towards developing intercultural communicative competence and encouraging citizenship education of all participants. The main goals were:

- strengthening contacts and exchanging intercultural insights on cultural values between partner institutions to influence teaching practices in partner countries;

- developing knowledge and understanding among secondary school teachers about the EU and Turkish cultural identities, about historical periods of mutual engagement, and past interactions between the three cultures;

- promoting innovative teaching practices based on a mutual exchange of professional views and values, as well as fostering respect for partners' cultural identity. These principles were to be spread throughout the student population involved in the project and multiplied in teachers' working environments.

Furthermore, the PERMIT project proposed to strengthen the dialogue within civil society by bringing elements of citizenship education into the

classroom, such as human rights, ethical behaviour, personal responsibility, and critical thinking, so as to engage in a discussion of these matters at the grass-roots level.

In order to achieve its objectives, the project envisaged expanding intercultural and citizenship considerations to curricular subjects that would traditionally shun such issues, thus proposing a radical rethinking of established teaching practices, based on the conviction that in a closely knit multicultural society intercultural sensitivity must permeate subjects across the curriculum.

To bring about a change of attitudes and teaching practices envisaged by the PERMIT project, a number of activities took place both on national and international level, such as workshops, seminars, and exchanges on the Internet in which teachers, researchers and students could exchange views and learn from each other. However, in order to initiate these activities, a preliminary investigation was needed to research the underlying views, attitudes, and values on intercultural issues within the PERMIT project's intended scope.

In order to achieve the aims of the PERMIT project, the core partners University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities (UP FHS) in Slovenia; University Ca' Foscari in Italy; and Yildiz University in Turkey, engaged secondary schools in all three countries and reached a considerable number of teachers and students.

We also considered it important to assess the overall stance towards intercultural and citizenship topics of teachers and students prior to launching the revision of teaching materials and of classroom activities. The students' questionnaire in particular was meant to provide researchers and teachers with a simple tool for assessing students' progress in this area.

The present paper, therefore, first examines the theory underlying the approaches adopted in promoting intercultural awareness and

sensitivity, continues by addressing a few focal points in assessing intercultural communicative competence in students, and comments on the salient issues that transpired from the analysis of the questionnaires. In conclusion, a few brief observations are made on teaching materials produced by Slovene, Turkish, and Italian teachers within the PERMIT project, especially those considered to successfully implement the intercultural approach and education to democratic citizenship.

Cross-Cultural Versus Intercultural Approach

Intercultural awareness and competence is at the centre of many aspects of life in a globalized world. Amidst constant technological advancement, daily contacts, real or virtual, with culturally and linguistically diverse groups have become a normal occurrence for pupils from an early age. It is therefore important for teachers and promoters of intercultural communicative competence to ask the question: *How do pupils read and interpret the information and signs transmitted in these contacts with other cultures?*, *What do they notice and why?, What assumptions are triggered and why?* and, *How does the multicultural environment influence pupils' attitudes and values, their worldview in general?*

Furthermore, we must consider which teaching approach can best help them to cope with the challenges presented by multicultural environments and how to integrate it into our teaching practices. A brief examination of theoretical trends dealing with the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence that underpin approaches used within the PERMIT project will help us grapple with these aspects of education.

In the field of research communication between people from different cultural backgrounds, two quite distinct approaches have been adopted to raise awareness and sensitivity of otherness, namely, the cross-cultural approach and the intercultural approach. They both share common

tenets and principles. Indeed, they even intersect in many aspects, although they tackle the common field of research from different angles. The cross-cultural approach originates in the USA and draws mainly on anthropological research principles. In American universities, courses on cross-cultural communication are normally offered within departments of anthropology and communication studies. The intercultural approach, on the other hand, derives its methods from the teaching of languages and has developed mostly within the department of applied linguistics at European universities.

Cross-Cultural Approach

The cross-cultural approach to analysing communication in multicultural settings draws on insights offered by anthropological, culturological, psychological and communication research. It started developing in response to the needs of diplomats and businessmen for a better understanding of foreign cultural environments and, therefore, tries to compare cultures and identify their distinctive features.

An early attempt to map the *distinctive features of cultures* can be found in the work of E. T. Hall (1959: 190-192), who introduced concepts such as *high context* and *low context cultures* (1977: 35-52) as well as cultures functioning within *monochromic* and *polychromic time systems* (1966: 25-32). According to his theory, communication in a *high context culture* is highly ritualised and encodes little explicit information in a message, requiring a deeper understanding of behavioural patterns; whereas in a *low context culture,* messages are rather explicit and straightforward. In terms of the embeddedness of culture in a time system, Hall suggests that people from various societies have different ways of managing time requirements. The *monochromic time system* is characteristic of cultures that expect people to compartmentalize and plan their activities one at a time, while the *polychromic time system* describes

cultures in which people tend to engage in several activities at the same time.

Additional tools for a cross-cultural analysis were provided by Hofstede's (1980) *five dimensions of culture*, namely, *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *individualism versus collectivism*, *masculinity versus femininity* and *long versus short term orientation*. These attributes condition our behaviour, norms, values, and beliefs, forming the *software of the mind* of individuals from each cultural background and defining a person's expectations or responses inculcated by the cultural environment. While Hofstede's analysis' instruments are based on a large-scale investigation and his approach has had a large following in business circles, it has also been criticised for promoting an oversimplified view of behavioural patterns and can, therefore, lead to stereotyping.

The above approach can also be criticised for neglecting the role of language as a salient and informing element of each culture and overlooking language's centrality for anthropological research. Whorf, in the first half of the previous century, claimed that "*the linguistic relativity principle* which means …users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world." (Carroll, 1956: 221).

Previous researchers' neglect of the importance of language has been tackled by Anna Wierzbicka's impressive body of work into cross-cultural linguistics. Within the domain of contrastive semantics, her research analyses the semantic components (*conceptual primitives*) of the core vocabulary of numerous languages and concludes that there are only about fifty *universal concepts* and just one absolute *semantic universal*: the meaning of the personal pronoun *"I"* (Wierzbicka 1996: 36-37). Within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, her analysis of speech acts across a wide

range of languages further illustrates the implications of cultural and linguistic conditioning on cross-cultural interactions (Wierzbicka 2003).

The theory of cross-cultural communication attempts to intertwine cultural and linguistic insights was further developed by Els Oksaar (1997). Talking about *code-switching behaviour* in multicultural and multilingual environments, she analyses *communicative acts* in terms of *culturemes*, defined as communicative behaviour patterns, and *behaviouremes*, which comprise verbal, paralinguistic, nonverbal and extra verbal elements. As a result, her *cultureme theory* not only expands the field of research to include semiotics, but can also be viewed as a bridge between the cross-cultural and intercultural communication approaches, contrasting and comparing cultures in a holistic manner as well as raising awareness of the processes enhancing intercultural communication.

Another attempt to integrate both the cross-cultural and the intercultural approach to communicating across cultural boundaries is given in M. J. Bennett's (1993) *integrative approach to global and domestic diversity*. Postulating *radical constructivism* (Kelly, 1963) as the basis for ethnocentrism, the author devises a model of gradual increase of intercultural sensitivity that leads from the initial *ethnocentric stages* (denial of cultural difference, defence against such difference, minimisation of its importance) to more advanced *ethnorelative stages* (acceptance of cultural difference, adaptation to such difference, a final cultural integration and identification with the adopted culture).

What distinguishes the intercultural approach from the cross-cultural approach is that the former seeks to build on the common ground, the similarities and the integrative elements of cultures in contact while developing a deeper understanding of the defining elements of an individual's own cultural conditioning. The latter compares and contrasts cultures within various parameters in order to discover and understand the differences, thus focusing on unveiling a somewhat simplified system of

behavioural features constituting the 'otherness' of unfamiliar cultural environments. Promoting distinctions between cultural circles and analytical oversimplifications can also lead to conclusions predicting the inevitability of a future "clash of cultures"(Huntington 1997).

Intercultural Approach

Drawing on lessons learned from the rich tradition of the language classroom, the intercultural approach focuses on understanding one's own culture, on a critical assessment of the limits and impositions of our own cultural conditioning. This approach helps us to decentre and empathise with people from other cultural environments as we engage them in trying to convey our meaning or understand theirs. Just as having a good command of our mother tongue helps us acquire a foreign language while contrasting the two linguistic systems, intercultural awareness helps us to realise the differences and overcome mishaps in order to ease communication flow. Since both the communicative and collaborative language teaching approaches have proved successful, applied linguists have tried to extend these methods to intercultural dialogue, extending intercultural communicative awareness to mean language awareness and cultural sensitivity, because "language ... used in the context of communication is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways" (Kramsch, 1988: 3).

Coming from a tradition of strong group identification in terms of ethnicity or religion, originating from the political organisation in nation states (Bauman, 1999), the need for intercultural dialogue, equal rights and mutual respect of culturally diverse groups is stressed in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Human Rights. Likewise, the Treaty establishing the European Community (Article 3) states the intent of "fully respecting ... cultural and linguistic diversity" of member states, promoting a new model of cultural integration that requires intercultural communicative competence from each individual of the Community.

In order to achieve intercultural communicative competence and, therefore, be ready to actively participate in such a diversified community (in terms of nationalities, cultures and languages), Michael Byram (1997 and 2008a) proposes "an integrated framework for language, culture and citizenship education" based on "*five orientations*" that prepare learners for *interacting, understanding, and empathising* with people of different values and beliefs and different norms and expectations. Building on respect for otherness and promoting a critical reassessment of 'own' cultural environment, this approach emphasizes the 'oneness' of humanity, positing cultural differences as a challenge that can successfully be integrated into our classroom practices, just like learning foreign languages.

The approach is structured so as to foster mutual knowledge of interlocutors in terms of their social backgrounds, history, practices, perceptions, products, institutions, etc., as well as the processes of interaction as part of the *cognitive orientation*. Within the *evaluative orientation,* attitudes of curiosity and openness are promoted, as well as a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and to question beliefs about one's own. The *comparative orientation* expands the skill of interpreting documents, events, tenets, customs, and values from another culture by explaining and relating these facets of culture to events, documents, customs… from one's own culture, thus helping us to identify areas where misunderstandings can occur and promoting empathy as an approach to overcome potential conflict. It is mainly in this dimension of intercultural education that insights and devices developed within the cross-cultural approach can fruitfully be adopted. The *communicative orientation* leads to the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences. The *action orientation* advances discovery and interaction, whereby these skills can be employed under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. Integrating all these elements into our classroom practices leads to achieving the *critical cultural and political orientation*, an ability to evaluate practices, perspectives and

products critically in one's own environment as well as in other cultures and, on the basis of explicit criteria, enhance efficient communication with persons from other cultures in a foreign language with the purpose of engaging with and affecting an (international) community.

Intercultural communication concentrates on developing skills that can enhance *intercultural awareness, tolerance of ambiguity, openness to diversity* by drawing on research in the field of linguistics, ethnography, and political science. It promotes intercultural dialogue as an active, engaged attitude of each individual discovering and dealing with diversity, while also critically evaluating one's own cultural identity, thus building a common ground within which communication can take place. It leads present and future members of the EU to aspire to develop intercultural communicative competence as a precondition to adopting an intercultural democratic citizenship. It does not postulate cultural otherness as something to observe, copy and adapt to in contacts with foreigners as proposed by the cross-cultural approach, but prepares us for active participation in a multicultural society and a daily engagement with a kaleidoscope of culturally and linguistically tinged behaviour patterns, beliefs, values, and world views.

We need to be precise in our use of language and terminology. Byram (2008b: 16) identifies a close relationship between intercultural communicative competence and the actual interiorisation of language use when he draws a fine line between *multilingualism* and *plurilingualiasm* in two ways. The first way is to use 'multilingualism' to refer to geographical spaces and 'plurilingualism' to refer to people. Slovenia is a multilingual space in which several languages are present. Some are used in schools as a media of instruction, some taught as subjects, and some are not recognised in schools. In this multilingual space, there are some people who use more than one language and are plurilingual but there are others – probably very few, in fact – who use only one language, and are 'monolingual'. This is a sociolinguistic usage.

The second way to use the distinction multi/pluri is when referring to individuals. This is a psychological usage. The Common European Framework (CEFR) says that some people know a number of languages which are kept separate in their minds and experience; this is sometimes referred to as 'co-ordinate' capacity in languages. Other people are considered 'plurilingual' – another term is 'compound' capacity – because they do not keep their languages separate:

Plurilingualism …does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages inter-relate and interact in different situations … A person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communications with a particular interlocutor. (CEFR, p4).

This second definition of integrating various languages into actual communication proposes spontaneous "code switching" between languages as a higher level of interiorisation of cultural awareness and self-awareness. On Bennet's (2008) scale it would probably coincide with the highest level of *ethnorelativism*, namely, *integration*, but an integration that does not overlook or deny cultural and linguistic distinctions and, therefore, does not lead to *acculturation*.

Despite marked differences between the cross-cultural and the intercultural approach in terms of the methods used in analysing communication in multicultural settings and in terms of approaches to overcoming hindrances to communication, the two approaches both contribute to a better understanding of an area of study that is focal in a globalised world and has been generating increased attention so as to confirm the claim that developing intercultural communicative competence can be defined as the *tertiary socialization* (Byram, 2008a: 106).

Students' Questionnaires as a Tool of Analysis of Intercultural Awareness

The conceptualization of the questionnaire as a tool to analyse current intercultural awareness and competence of students draws on insights expounded in the above sources, but was particularly informed by Byram's model, which defines the objectives of intercultural education in terms of attitudes and values that are a precondition to *openness to diversity*, "willingness to suspend belief about one's culture and disbelief about others" (Byram 2008:10). The questionnaire directs student's attention to intercultural attitudes present in their own environment, thus examining and alerting participants to the multicultural dimension of their everyday contacts.

The questions in the Questionnaire for Students were clustered around five main topics, investigating the following aspects of intercultural experience and attitudes:

- personal data and linguistic background of students;

- the frequency and type of contacts that students had with people from different cultural backgrounds, as well as a brief analysis of the observations triggered by diverse behavioural, belief and value systems;

- students' awareness of and sensitivity to cultural diversity present in their own environment, their knowledge and understanding of various cultural groups;

- the formation of students' own cultural identity;

- students' attitudes to core issues of a culturally heterogeneous society.

While the scope of this paper does not allow for a lengthier report on the data gathered, a short summary of the salient points, regarding the perception of intercultural issues and their grasp of core issues within our multicultural society of students in all three countries, can help us justify

the path followed in organizing the approaches developed within the PERMIT project.

Personal Data and Linguistic Background

The survey was conducted between January and March 2009. The questionnaires were administered to students attending the second and/or third year of secondary school (15 or 18 years old students) in all three participating countries. In Italy, 208 students were included in the survey, in Slovenia 139 students were polled, and in Turkey 390 students were canvassed. The ratio between female and male students was slanted towards the female gender in all the schools (Italy: female 68.6% vs. male 31.4%; Slovenia: female 62.6% vs. male 37.4%; Turkey: female 73.2% vs. male 26.8%) and seems to reflect the gender composition in our secondary schools.

In Italy, five schools from the North-Eastern region (Veneto) were included in the survey. Six secondary schools were selected to participate in Slovenia; the majority were in the coastal, bilingual region and one in the capital. In order to have a more representative sample of students' answers, both Slovene and Italian minority schools were included, as well as an English medium school leading to the international baccalaureate. In Turkey, eight secondary schools from the larger area around Istanbul and Bursa were included, among them an international school with English as the medium of instruction.

In spite of the international character of some schools, the great majority of students were born in the country where they attended school (in Italy 93.3%, in Slovenia 91.8%, in Turkey 93%) and listed the official language of that country as their mother tongue (Italian 89.9%; Slovene or Italian 71.9% and 3.6% respectively; Turkish 95.5%). Other languages listed as mother tongues by students in Italy were Romanian (3 students), Chinese (2 students), Albanian (1), Arabic (1), Spanish (1), local dialect

(1); in Slovenia Spanish (1), German (1) and a number of languages from countries composing the former Yugoslavia were listed as mother tongue (Croat (7); Serbian (7); Bosnian (3); Albanian (2); Serbo-Croat (1)); while in Turkey English (3), Kurdish (3) and Arabic (1) were also entered as mother tongues. Interestingly enough, only six students in Slovenia and one student in Italy claimed to be completely bilingual with two mother tongues.

In order to further investigate the extent of multilingualism and plurilinguialism in students' immediate environment, we asked the following questions: *How many and what languages are normally spoken in your family?* and *Do you speak any other language in your environment?*.

Students in Italy most often reported the use of local dialect (8.3%) in their family in addition to their mother language. Students from Slovenia reported mainly using languages spoken in former Yugoslavia in their domestic environment (40%) or the local dialect (5%); whereas the Turkish students seem to be living in monolingual families to a large extent. Frequent linguistic code-switching and mixing appears to be the most common in families of students in Slovenia (56.8%) and much less so in Italy (27.5%) or Turkey (13%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Replies to the question: *How many and what languages are normally spoken in your family?*

	Italian	Slovene or Italian	Turkish
Only one	72.5%	43.2%	87%
Along with other languages	27.5%	56.8%	13%

When asked about the languages spoken in their wider environment the results were divergent. Students in Turkey appear to be living in the most multilingual environment, which Istanbul and the adjacent regions certainly are. More than 60% of them reported to be frequently using English as a language of communication, sometimes also the Kurdish language (10.7%), Bulgarian (6.7%) or French (6.7%). More than half of students from Slovenia related that they communicated in other languages beside their mother tongue, mainly in Italian (24.5%) and English (24.5%), but also in Croat (7.9%), German (4%), Spanish (4%), French (3.4%), Albanian (1.4%), Serbian (1.4%), to mention just the more frequently quoted languages. Italian students only listed the local dialect (13.9%) as an alternative variety of language for communication in their environment on a regular basis.

Table 2. Replies to the question: *Do you speak any other language in your environment?*

	Italy	Slovenia	Turkey
None	53.8%	40.2%	8%
English	5.3%	24.6%	66.7%
Italian		24.5%	
Other	13.9%	21.8%	24.3%

The above data suggests that polled students from Slovenia, live in an environment where languages intermingle the most, leading to extensive plurilingualism in their everyday life. At the same time, all the most frequently used languages have coexisted in the researched region for a long time: Slovene Istria, the coastal region squeezed between Italy and Croatia, has always been a linguistically, ethnically, and culturally mixed region, where Croat, Italian and Slovene formed a common dialect, Istrian, and where Italian is one of the official languages. Furthermore, migrations within the former Yugoslavia contributed to the linguistic mix have been stabilized and interiorised in the society, especially with the second and third generation of immigrants, to which the students belong.

The replies of students from Italy surprised even the Italian researchers, since results were expected to show a much more varied composition of the group in terms of ethnic and linguistic diversity, due to recent strong migration trends to North Italy. It would seem that the polling of secondary school students may have been slanted by the choice of schools included, namely, more academically focused grammar schools could have a higher percentage of monolingual Italian students, whereas vocational schools, which were not included, may have yielded different results. Such a conclusion would indicate an early stratification of the Italian society according to ethnic origin within educational institutions which also seems to lead to strong monolingual segregation within the immediate environment.

Similarly, students in Turkey appear to grow in mostly monolingual, Turkish speaking families, but encounter people of different linguistic backgrounds frequently in their larger environment. Surprisingly, English is mainly used on such social occasions which would suggest that English is well established as a "lingua franca" in Istanbul and the adjacent regions.

Contacts with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds

Another area considered important in order to gather insights into students' previous exposure to intercultural encounters were the contacts they had had with the wider international world, beyond their usual immediate environment. Therefore, we enquired about contacts they may have established during travel abroad and on the Internet.

To our surprise, contacts on the Internet do not seem to be particularly relevant for our study since most of the students in Turkey (92.8%) and Slovenia (87.3%) report mainly communicating with relatives abroad and the students in Italy seem to be less keen on virtual contacts with people abroad (only 30.8% of students reported engaging in such activities), while questions regarding travel abroad yielded a more interesting range of information.

The questionnaire first asked for the following information: *Have you ever travelled abroad?;* then asked students also to *list the reason for their travel abroad; How long did your stay abroad last?;* and inquired about *the country/ies they had visited.*

It came as no surprise in our globalized world that young people start travelling very early, so that the vast majority of students had had some experience of other cultural environments already in their teens as shown in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. Replies to the question: *Have you ever travelled abroad?*

	Students that have travelled abroad	Students that have not travelled abroad yet
Italy	79.3%	20.7%
Slovenia	97.1%	2.9%
Turkey	80.1%	19.9%

The reasons that prompted students from the three environments to visit foreign countries seem to be vastly similar, mainly tourism, but Table 4 also shows that institutions within the EU take full advantage of international exchange programmes available at secondary educational level.

Table 4. Replies eliciting *the reason for students' travel abroad.*

	Italy	Slovenia	Turkey
Tourism	48.1%	38.8%	52.1%
Visiting relatives	16%	22.3%	27.1%
School exchanges and excursions	31.7%	38.8%	10%

The length of students' visits was considered important in terms of the level and degree of contacts with diverse cultures they had been exposed to in the foreign country. However, the data revealed that longer sojourn was directly related to visiting relatives and, therefore, most frequent among students from Turkey (Table 5 below). Contacts with "otherness" may be rather limited in such circumstances.

Table 5. Replies to the question: *How long did your stay abroad last?*

	Italy	Slovenia	Turkey
Up to 2 weeks	92%	77.7%	47.9%
A month or more	8%	22.3%	52.1%

As to the places visited, students from Slovenia listed almost all the European countries, with the neighbouring countries featuring prominently (Italy and Croatia were mentioned by 84.9% and 84.2% of students respectively, Austria by 66.9% of students), but more distant places were also mentioned (USA by 10% of students, Egypt by 4.3%, and a few overseas countries were mentioned once each). In view of the small size of Slovenia and the high rate of mixed family background, it is not surprising that these students are the most frequent travellers. While many students from Turkey listed a number of countries, 54.3% of them declared

to have travelled to many countries, the most frequently mentioned being Bulgaria (21.7%), Germany (8.7%), the Arab countries (5.7%) and Greece (5.5%). The Italian students, on the other hand, mention frequently various popular tourist destinations all over Europe, such as France (18.3%), UK (10.6%), Spain (9.1%), Germany (8.6%), Austria (6.7%) and Croatia (4.3%), but individual students mention also overseas destinations such as the Maldives, Tunisia, Egypt, Brazil, China, Russia etc. These data probably confirm the earlier conclusion that the group interviewed in Italy were a rather elite, privileged group of students with many means.

A few questions regarding students' travel focused on their experience of intercultural encounters and asked: *What is your experience with people of other nationalities or cultural backgrounds?;* as well as offering the option to reply that they *did not notice any difference* and that they *did not mix with foreigners*. The replies revealed that they were all enthusiastic travellers as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Replies to the question: *What is your experience with people of other nationalities or cultural backgrounds?*

	Italy	Slovenia	Turkey
Not at all/ particularly positive	8.1%	2.1%	7.3%
More or less positive	20.1%	15.8%	22.8%
Quite positive	46.2%	39.6%	35.9%
Completely positive	25.8%	39.6%	22.4%

While the majority of students from Slovenia replied that their interactions with people of other nationalities or cultural backgrounds was mainly positive, they also stated that they often did not mix at all with

foreigners during their trips abroad (39.6%). This reluctance to engage with foreigners may also explain why they observed little difference between their own culture and the one they had come in contact with (no differences at all 12.2%, no particular difference 10.8%, more or less no difference 33.1%, quite some differences 17.3%, complete difference 12.2%). A similar situation was reported by the students from Turkey, namely, almost half of their replies (47.2%) indicated that little difference was perceived and more than one third of the students (34.9%) did not mix with foreigners during their stay abroad. Data for students from Italy were not available.

The responses from students may suggest that they lack the skill to observe communication and behaviour patterns in intercultural encounters in a completely new environment and have so far only achieved a limited intercultural sensitivity and, therefore, have not stepped over the threshold of the *ethnocentric stage* (Bennett 2004:153).

Students' Awareness and Sensitivity to Cultural Diversity Present in Their Own Environment

Even if students lack intercultural awareness and fail to discern many differences in cultures they visit during their travels, they appear to be somewhat more observant when in constant contact with other cultural groups from their environment.

When asked to *list the nationalities or minorities living in their community or town (relatives, friends, neighbours and acquaintances)* students from all three countries were able to produce very comprehensive accounts. Thus students from Turkey reported on living among the Kurds, Bulgarians, Armenians, Bosnians, Arabs, Greek, Russians, Jews, Americans, the British, Australians, and French. Students from Italy were less accurate in determining the nationality of peoples around them, but paid attention to religion too. They clustered people in their environment as Westerners, South Americans, Sub-Saharan Africans, Orthodox

Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus. Almost all students in Slovenia listed the Italian nationality as well as the Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians, and Kosovars. Fewer mentioned the Roma, although they are quite a prominent national minority in Slovenia. However, it was disturbing to notice also cases of denigrating reference to minorities (Šiptarji, Cigoti, z Balkana).

Nevertheless, the great majority of students from all three countries agreed that diversity was an important feature of the modern world (*quite important*: students in Italy 24.3%, Slovenia 35.5%, Turkey 52.7%; *very important*: students in Italy 28.6%, Slovenia 23.7%, Turkey 29.1%). Students in Turkey seem to have the most positive attitude to ethnic and cultural diversity, while the attitudes of students in Italy and Slovenia tend to show more restraint and even sometimes consider diversity *unimportant* (Slovenia 6.5%, Italy 3.7%, Turkey 2.2%).

The nationality mix that students recorded in their environment may also have influenced their replies to the more specific question, namely, *What similarities did you notice when mixing with people from other cultural backgrounds or nationalities?*

The majority of students in Turkey observed that the *languages* other nationalities speak were *dissimilar* to their own language (79.7%), that their *body language* was *dissimilar* (60.4%) as well as their *habits and customs* (72.8%), their food (57%) and their *religion or faith* (67.9%), while they mainly thought that other nationalities had *quite similar attitude to money* (43.9%), *to leisure activities* (50%), *to work* (59.8%) and *patriotism* (49.2%).

Students in Italy observed some *differences* with other nationalities in their environment in relation to *language* (60.6%), *money* (62%), *patriotism* (52.9%), *faith* (52.4%), *habits and customs* (35.6%), but tended to declare the other categories *more or less similar or quite similar: body*

language (55,2%), *behaviour*(59.6%), *food* (62%), *attitude to leisure time*(64.5%), *attitude to work* (58.6%), *attitude to family* (60.6%).

The ones that considered people in their environment the most similar were the students in Slovenia: they most frequently declared as *more or less similar* or *quite similar* all the categories listed, namely, *attitude to money* (52.5%), *faith* (56.3%), *patriotism* (56.4%), *attitude to leisure* (60.4%), *body language* (61,9%), *attitude to family* (62.6%), *habits and customs* (63.3%), *food* (65.4%), *behaviour* (66.2%), *time attitude to work* (68.3%). Furthermore, 23.7% believe that even the *language* the other groups speak is *very similar*. Such conclusions are probably due to the nationality mix they are most frequently in contact with, namely, neighbouring ethnic groups with a long tradition of coexistence and a predominantly Slavic mix of languages.

We can conclude that students in Turkey and Italy are keen observers of similarities and diversity in their environment. Such claims can hardly be made for students from Slovenia, who appear to have been imbued with some prejudice and stereotyping from their environment.
Interestingly enough, when asked if issues meant to enhance intercultural awareness had been discussed in their classes, students from Turkey scored the highest. As shown in Table 7, their replies suggest that discussions about a *respectful exchange of views between students* were quite frequent or even very frequent in Turkish classrooms, that they talked about *respect for different ethnic groups* quite often or even very often, and frequently considered *respect for other religions* and *having an open attitude to other cultural and linguistic environments* during their classes.

Table 7. Replies of students in Turkey to the question: *Have you discussed the following topics in your class?*

	never	not often	sometimes	quite often	very often
a) a respectful exchange of views between students	5.3%	8.5%	15.4%	**26.6%**	**42.7%**
b) respect for different ethnic groups	3.3%	7.7%	15.4%	**26.7%**	**45.7%**
c) respect for other religions	6.1%	5.3%	13%	**19.9%**	**54.9%**
d) an open attitude to other cultural and linguistic environments	2.4%	6.5%	15%	**26%**	**48.4%**

These topics seem to be less frequent in schools in North-Eastern Italy. The majority of students reported that they sometimes or quite frequently tackled issues like a *respectful exchange of views between students,* or held discussions related to *respect for different ethnic groups*, or *respect for other religions* or *having an open attitude to other cultural and linguistic environments.* A much smaller percentage of students thought that such topics were considered very frequently in their classrooms, while quite a few also reported that these topics were ignored or discussed very little in school as is evident from the overview in Table 8.

Table 8. Overview of replies of students in Italy to the question: *Have you discussed the following topics in your class?*

	never	not often	sometimes	quite often	very often
a) a respectful exchange of views between students	12.0%	11.5%	**39.9%**	**22.1%**	9.6%
b) respect for different ethnic groups	6.3%	17.3%	**26.9%**	**26.4%**	18.3%
c) respect for other religions	9.6%	19.7%	**27.9%**	**20.7%**	17.3%
d) an open attitude to other cultural and linguistic environments	7.7%	10.1%	**39.4%**	**29.8%**	7.2%

The replies from students in Slovenia cover the whole range of options with on average only about half of the students reporting that these issues are quite often or very often debated in their classes, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Replies of students in Slovenia to the question: *Have you discussed the following topics in your class?*

	never	not often	sometimes	quite often	very often
a) a respectful exchange of views between students	**23%**	10,8%	**21,6%**	18,7%	19,4%
b) respect for different ethnic groups	10,1%	14,4%	18%	**25,2%**	**27,3%**
c) respect for other religions	7,2%	12,2%	23,7%	**27,3%**	**24,5%**
d) an open attitude to other cultural and linguistic environments	7,2%	12,9%	22,3%	**25,9%**	**25,2%**

It would seem that such topics are considered less central to the educational process in Slovenia, especially when compared to the frequency with which issues central to raising intercultural awareness are dealt with in schools in Turkey. In view of the earlier reports on the considerable variety of ethnic and linguistic origin of students in secondary schools in Slovenia, respect for diversity may be an issue difficult to tackle in class indicating that teachers need more guidance in terms of the way they handle challenging intercultural issues.

Students' Views on the Formation of Their Own Cultural Identity

We also inquired about students' views as to *what best defined their cultural identity* and suggested the following areas of cultural identification: *the national anthem, geographical position, language, culture and the arts, history, traditions, religion / faith, habits and customs.*

Students in all three countries were quite unanimous in defining their *language* as a strong rallying point, declaring *language* as quite important or very important in defining their identity (students from Turkey 27.2% and 61% respectively, Slovenia 33.1% and 46.8% respectively, Italy 32.2% and 34.1% respectively). They were agreed to a great extent in terms of the perceived importance of *traditions* for the formation of their identity: 35.4% of students from Turkey considered traditions quite important, while 49.6% declared them very important; 30.2% of students from Slovenia found them quite important and 33.8% very important; whereas 33.2% of students from Italy replied that traditions were quite important and 37.5% declared them as very important. Their scores were also similar regarding the importance of *habits and customs*, although they found them less central to their identification. Sixty five percent of students from Italy listed *habits and customs* as "more or less important" or "quite important", 63.4% of

students from Slovenia and 60.6% of students from Turkey also agreed with this view.

Slightly larger differences can be traced in students' views on their *national anthem*, which seems to unify students from Turkey more than students from Italy or Slovenia as displayed in Table 10.

Table 10. Replies to the question whether *their national anthem defines their cultural identity.*

the national anthem	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	4.8%	10.6%	**33.7%**	**23.6%**	16.9%
Slovenia	5.8%	14.4%	21.6%	**26.6%**	**28.1%**
Turkey	2.4%	4.1%	8,1%	**16.7%**	**65%**

The *geographical position* appears to be a strong unifying element in the views of students from Slovenia, but less so in the opinion of students from the other two countries, as indicated in Table 11.

Table 11. Replies to the question whether *the geographical position of their country defines their cultural identity.*

the geographical position	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	5.8%	19.2%	**21.6%**	**23.1%**	21.2%
Slovenia	4.3%	13.7%	24.5%	**25.9%**	**25.2%**
Turkey	5.7%	14.2%	**27.6%**	**30.1%**	19.1%

Slovene students were also more ambivalent regarding the impact of *culture and the arts* on their cultural identification, as well as regarding the importance of *history*, whereas students from the other two nations identify strongly with these aspects of their culture (Table 12 and 13).

Table 12. Replies to the question whether *culture and the arts defines their cultural identity.*

culture and the arts	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	1.4%	5.3%	12.0%	**26.9%**	**45.2%**
Slovenia	3.6%	14.4%	**24.5%**	**27.3%**	**27.3%**
Turkey	0.8%	2%	8.5%	**36.2%**	**50%**

Table 13. Replies to the question whether *history defines their cultural identity.*

history	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	0.5%	6.7%	20.7%	**25%**	**38%**
Slovenia	2.9%	12.9%	**27.3%**	19.4%	**35.3%**
Turkey	0.0%	2%	9.3%	**25.2%**	**62.2%**

Both these aspects of cultural identification may be less important to students from Slovenia since they are a less homogeneous group than the students from Turkey and Italy in terms of cultural background.

Furthermore, differences in perception of *religion or faith* as a core element in establishing cultural identification may also be closely linked to the position and role of religion in their society which seems to be the most relevant in Turkey, and far less important in Slovenia and Italy. (Table 13)

Table 13. Overview of replies to the question whether *religion or faith defines their cultural identity.*

religion / faith	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	10.1%	13%	**26.4%**	**26%**	13.9%
Slovenia	8.6%	20.9%	**28.8%**	19.4%	**20.1%**
Turkey	3.7%	7.3%	15.9%	**30.1%**	**41.5%**

The replies gathered in this section of the questionnaire were considered important in informing the teaching approaches to be developed within the PERMIT project and as guidelines for the new teaching materials. Especially so, since students in all three countries appear to expect educational institutions to inform views of the whole society regarding intercultural issues, as expressed in the following batch of answers.

When asking for *the most responsible person or institution informing attitudes towards other cultures and nationalities*, the replies showed that students from all three countries expected teachers to help them cope with these issues. In particular in Turkey and Italy, where almost 66% of students declared school as *quite* or *completely responsible* for their intercultural attitudes. However, 55.4% of students from Slovenia also hold educational institutions predominantly responsible for their attitudes to "otherness" as shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Replies to the question: *to what extent schools are responsible for the attitude of our society towards persons from other cultures or of other nationalities?*

schools	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	2.4%	4.8%	19.2%	**35.6%**	**29.8%**
Slovenia	4.3%	12.9%	**25.2%**	**36%**	19.4%
Turkey	2.8%	7.3%	22%	**35.4%**	**30.5%**

Students appear quite unanimous in ascribing the media as a huge influence on their views on other nationalities and cultures, most prominently in Turkey and Slovenia, but also in Italy.

Table 15. Replies to the question: *to what extent the media are responsible for the attitude of our society towards persons from other cultures or of other nationalities?*

the media	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	4.3%	9.6%	22.6%	**31.3**%	**24**%
Slovenia	4.3%	10.1%	22.3%	**25.9**%	**34.5**%
Turkey	4.5%	6.9%	12.2%	**36.2**%	**38.2**%

However, the maturity of high school students in all three countries is demonstrated by the high percentages of students ready to take responsibility for their own views and attitudes towards "the others" as shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Replies to the question: *to what extent each individual is responsible for the attitude of our society towards persons from other cultures or of other nationalities?*

each individual	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	5.3%	8.2%	23.1%	**30.8**%	**24.5**%
Slovenia	2.2%	12.9%	23.7%	**25.9**%	**30.9**%
Turkey	5.7%	11%	18.3%	**26**%	**35.8**%

With Slovene students in particular, the family seems to have a big impact on their relating to groups of a different cultural background, but this view is also shared with students from Turkey and by students from Italy to a lesser degree as shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Replies to the question: *to what extent the family is responsible for the attitude of our society towards persons from other cultures or of other nationalities?*

the family	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	4.8%	12%	**23.6**%	**31.7**%	19.7%
Slovenia	9.4%	10.8%	18%	**26.6**%	**31.7**%
Turkey	6.9%	10.6%	**22.8**%	19.5%	**36.6**%

Interestingly enough, students from Italy and Slovenia in particular do not appear to rely on their political institution in matters related to intercultural education, whereas students from Turkey have high expectations from their government as shown in Table 18.

Table 18. Replies to the question: *to what extent the government is responsible for the attitude of our society towards persons from other cultures or of other nationalities?*

the government	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	4.8%	16.3%	**28.4**%	**31.7**%	10.1%
Slovenia	9.4%	10.8%	**36.7**%	**23**%	17.3%
Turkey	2.4%	13.4%	19.9%	**35**%	**26.8**%

While the formation of cultural and national identity is considered a difficult and controversial topic by many prominent researchers (Bauman,) students in all three countries, particularly in Turkey and Italy, expressed clear views on the primary sources of their identification and the sphere that influences them most. This would seem to indicate that students clearly perceive the core issues of a culturally and nationally heterogeneous society, although they may still have difficulties coping with intercultural encounters due to lack of intercultural communicative competences.

Students' Attitudes to the Core Issues of a Culturally Heterogeneous Society

We also questioned students on their views regarding the present day Europe as a community which declares respect for diversity as one of its core guiding principles.

The question asked was: *In your view, what are the essential elements of the present day Europe?* Students had to decide to what extent elements such as *an advanced level of democracy, a higher level of respect of human rights, multiculturalism, pluriconfessionality, intercultural*

dialogue, and *peaceful solution of conflicts* matter in defining the guiding values governing Europe.

All the sections of the questionnaire showed a much greater critical response among students from Italy and Slovenia than among the students from Turkey.

While two thirds of students from Turkey *quite* or *completely agreed* that an *advanced level of democracy is an essential feature of present day Europe*, the assessment of students from Italy was somewhat less favourable, while students in Slovenia were even more restrained. (Table 19)

Table 19. Replies to the question: *To what extent* an *advanced level of democracy can be considered an essential element of the present day Europe?*

an advanced level of democracy	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	2.4%	8.2%	**20.2%**	**32.2%**	**26.4%**
Slovenia	3.6%	5.8%	**20.1%**	13.7%	**29.5%**
Turkey	1.2%	10.2%	19.5%	**35.8%**	**30.9%**

The relative scepticism of students from both countries, which are already part of the EU, as opposed to students from Turkey, a country aspiring to enter the EU, is even more clear cut with respect to their assessment of *a higher level of respect of human rights, multiculturalism, pluriconfessionality, intercultural dialogue,* and *peaceful solution of conflicts in present day Europe.* As presented in Table 20, students in both Italy and Slovenia are more restrained in their belief that these critical issues for a society that promotes respect for diversity have already been successfully tackled.

Table 20. Replies to the question: *to what extent a higher level of respect of human rights, multiculturalism, pluriconfessionality, intercultural dialogue, peaceful solution of conflicts can be considered an essential element of the present day Europe?*

a higher level of respect of human rights	no	not particularly	more or less	quite	completely
Italy	2.4%	8.7%	**21.2%**	**35.1%**	17.3%
Slovenia	2.2%	3.6%	12.2%	**22.3%**	**32.4%**
Turkey	1.2%	4.5%	13%	**30.9%**	**48.4%**
multiculturalism					
Italy	4.3%	16.8%	**32.7%**	17.3%	8.7%
Slovenia	2.9%	5.8%	16.5%	**27.3%**	**20.9%**
Turkey	0.4%	5.3%	22.8%	**42.3%**	**26.8%**
pluriconfessionality					
Italy	1.4%	8.2%	**26%**	**32.2%**	16.3%
Slovenia	2.2%	8.6%	**23.7%**	**21.6%**	7.2%
Turkey	0.8%	4.5%	19.5%	**35.8%**	**37.8%**
intercultural dialogue					
Italy	4.8%	10.6%	**20.2%**	18.3%	**27.4%**
Slovenia	2.2%	5%	18.7%	**20.9%**	**25.2%**
Turkey	0.4%	4.1%	22.4%	**39.8%**	**31.3%**
peaceful solution of conflicts					
Italy	1.4%	11.5%	**27.9%**	**28.4%**	10.6%
Slovenia	0.7%	4.3%	18%	18%	**26.6%**
Turkey	6.9%	13%	19.1%	**26.4%**	**32.9%**

These results of the students' questionnaire could be interpreted in many different ways. They could indicate a certain level of disenchantment with the declared policies of the modern Europe among the youths living in it. However, assessment of students in Italy and Slovenia could also suggest that they have been alerted to the importance of respect for diversity and "otherness" and expect these core values to take a much more central position in the everyday life of the present day Europe. It can also be said that students from Turkey definitely expect the EU to take a leading role in enforcing all these noble principles.

Cross-Curricular Teaching Materials Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence

Based on insights revealed by the questionnaires, it was established that in order to further develop students' intercultural abilities and enhance their intercultural communicative competence, the new teaching materials should try to promote acquisition of new knowledge and understanding of the cultural makeup of their environment while also influencing students' attitudes and feelings towards various cultural groups. We agreed that it was necessary to anchor teaching materials and teaching approaches to the answers provided by the questionnaire and, therefore, to slightly diversify approaches to dealing with intercultural and citizenship issues according to the needs of students from different countries.

Guided by Dr. Anna Lia Proietti Ergun, teachers delved into the *Multiple Intelligence Theory* and were introduced to teaching approaches that reflect on many aspects of education in their own culture in order to create a "brain" and "interculturally" friendly environment in their courses and help students achieve a holistic acceptance of otherness. This also helped students to have an empathetic point of view towards other cultures, artistic production, and history, so as to seek answers to universal problems when interacting with members of other cultural groups.

The use of "*the metaphorical element*" in communication was proposed by Dr. Sadriye Gunes, whereby the application of "*metaphor activities*" was introduced in the teaching materials, as well as to explorations of students. This approach was meant to enhance self-awareness and analysis of own cultural beliefs and values, especially in relation to the various sciences. Dr. Gunes reported on a number of exceptionally imaginative interpretations of metaphors, linking scientific insights with intercultural insights, such as the essay which showed that students adopted the *heat* concept to refer to their own situations, and the *heat exchange* concept to explain a process of recognizing people different from themselves, communicating with them, opening up and sharing experience with them. She concluded that by exploiting the novelty of *metaphor activities,* intercultural communicative competence was enhanced and suggested that in this manner "the concept of empathy could be handled in an effective and efficient way".

Drawing on studies proposed by Bennett, Kramsch, Balboni, Byram, Giroux and others, Dr. Zudič Antonič suggested her own teaching strategy that can help students "to overcome negative attitudes towards other cultures, to outgrow the limitations of their world view". She claims that "*literary expression* allows for a more subtle linguistic appreciation, a discovery of a language whose meaning becomes manifold" and therefore, opens up a range of perspectives, experiences, sensations, which in turn help students to express more accurately their own views and insights. In this manner, a dialectics is established between the text and the reader which transcends "subjectiveness" and leads to "intersubjectiveness, intertextuality and interculturality". According to the author, at this point students "cross the border between information exchange and personal participation" and become "authors of their own learning", exploring from an intercultural perspective places in literature such as *town squares* and *streets* as expression of artistic, historic and cultural blending.

Internet forum exchanges among students and teachers from the three countries were facilitated by Dr. Juliana Raffaghelli. Students explored issues such as the role that religion plays in Italy, Turkey, and Slovenia by posting questions to the international PERMIT students, in order to learn about history and about the intersection of the Christian and the Muslim religions, as well as to analyze and contrast the main spiritual messages, principles, morals, and legends of various religions. Thus, the teaching materials developed within the PERMIT project were geared towards helping students develop not only tolerance of otherness, but also a positive attitude to various religious practices in different cultural environments.

Dr. Neva Čebron compiled a *Teacher's Portfolio* with a series of activities meant to help international teachers reconsider the salient issues of intercultural communicative competence and use of languages in an international setting. This tool offered activities that lent themselves to discussing the role and aims of intercultural communication in a multicultural world. Elements of the portfolio were also designed to help teachers and students monitor their progress in acquiring intercultural communicative competence against a clear set of criteria.

While these topics give an opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons, they also motivate students to reflect on and reassess practices established in their own environment, promoting a deeper understanding of the society at large. At the same time, these approaches generate new interest in other cultures and provide students with new methods of gathering information and drawing conclusions from it, helping them to keep an open mind when interacting with peers from various cultural environments.

Conclusions

This project has had many positive effects. The enthusiasm generated among teachers and students can certainly be listed among the most manifest ones. A great interest and curiosity triggered by contact with people from other cultural circles, as well as a hunger to better understand and engage with this intriguing otherness, transpired from the lively responses to activities and from the results of the project.

It can be concluded that the positive attitudes expressed in student replies to the questionnaires have been enhanced by the teaching materials and the activities proposed in them, thus giving students an opportunity to develop intercultural awareness in a much more structured fashion.

The PERMIT project proposed a novel mode to enhance the intercultural dialogue as a process comprising an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, as suggested in the White Paper on Intercultural Learning. Thus, we tried to establish the classroom as a place to give students the freedom and ability to express themselves, while also advancing their willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others, so as to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation, to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote tolerance and respect for the other.

The project and the teaching tools developed within this framework are a successful model which still needs further refining in terms of teacher training materials and teaching activities. However, it can help us determine a successful way of leading students from the *ethnocentric stage* to the *ethnorelative stage* (Bennett, 2004) of intercultural sensitivity, and support their discovery of themselves in others, the others in themselves

and, therefore, to acquire skills needed for an *intercultural citizenship* (Byram, 2008a).

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