

# ON THE IMPORTANCE OF USING APPROPRIATE CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

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Considering the experiences of the teacher trainers and the evaluations written by the student teachers we have gone quite some way during the first two phases of the EVE-project. This is reflected in the changes we made to the curriculum framework, which has now even been renamed ‘principles’ (see Brooks; chapter I). Notwithstanding the new terminology, the document still contains the four stages of learning which had also been part of the curriculum framework.

## **Deepening Understanding**

Disciplinary concepts and theories deepen our understanding of why differences (and similarities) in attitudes exist. However they do not have all the answers and some theories are inadequate. Pupils should use these concepts to question the data in the maps. They are then in a position to verify and reformulate these theories.

### Box 1: Description of Deepening Understanding

The third of these stages is called ‘deepening understanding’ (see box 1). In our first curriculum framework this stage was still called ‘investigating explanations’, but we soon felt that very often we and the student teachers were discussing different points of view rather than explaining data. Therefore, we felt we should focus on explanations *and* arguments. This led to a rebranding of this stage, so that it is now called ‘deepening understanding’. With this change it became a lot easier for the authors of the assignments and for the student teachers to handle the curriculum framework as the introduction of arguments opened up the scope

for different possible answers, whereas explanation was understood by some as the one and only conceivable solution.

Nevertheless, the task of deepening pupils' understanding of the data is far from simple. It is true that we were given some theoretical background knowledge by the researchers from the European Values Study (EVS), who collected the data, but this was mainly based in modernisation theory and although this may be a suitable approach for the scientific purposes of the EVS, it turned out to be too inflexible for use in the classroom. So, to be able to deepen understanding we as authors and the student teachers as practitioners started to focus on just one or two countries we felt familiar with. For the authors this was usually our own country and one or two other countries we had studied in greater depth. The student teachers often compared the host country to the country of their exchange partner. Both ways we were losing the focus on European values. Also while trying to focus on the theoretical approaches of the social scientists we somehow lost sight of the subject, in which these assignments were supposed to be used. Thus not surprisingly the student teachers in their evaluation remarked that 'it is very hard to develop lessons from an assignment that is not based on geographical concepts'.

To alleviate this problem we decided to refocus on the subject. We suggested shifting the attention from the data and the topics they cover to the subject content, e.g. to a geographical question that can be discussed with all the data on all the topics. A suggestion for such a 'big question' was: 'What kind of a place is Europe and what kind of a place would you like it to be?' which is now the overarching question in the new principles. This question is underpinned by a conception of Europe as a place that is made, maintained and contested thereby forming a unique site of history and identity (Cresswell, 2004). Combining this description of the concept of place with the organising concepts of geography (Taylor, 2008) we get a wide variety of possible approaches that can all be seen as suitable for geography lessons (see figure 1).

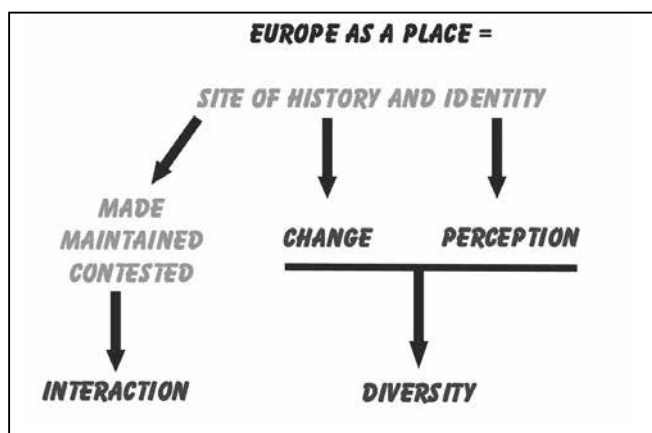


Figure 1: Europe as a place

Another problem arose when the student teachers were asked to use the background information offered by the Tilburg scientists to develop their lesson plans on family. This time the problem of using modernisation theory as an explanation was shifted from the teacher trainers to the student teachers and some of their reactions were extremely critical, but well-founded. Especially the Turkish student teachers felt that the strong relation envisaged between family values and religion could not hold true for their country.

It is interesting to note that this critique has been addressed in another section of the Value Studies, the World Values Survey (WVS). The research in this strand of the values studies agrees that there are two different dimensions of modernisation. The first dimension denotes the change from traditional to secular-rational values, the second the change from survival to self-expression values. The first dimension is seen as the classical modernisation process, while the second dimension denotes post-modernisation. Both dimensions are described by a set of ten items respectively (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Unfortunately, the items do not contain any family values. Nevertheless, there are two lists of items that strongly correlate with either the first or the second dimension (see box 2). And these lists do contain a number of items that are related to what people think about families:

#### 'FAMILY' CORRELATES OF TRADITIONAL VERSUS SECULAR-RATIONAL VALUES

Traditional values emphasize the following:

- » *One of respondent's main goals has been to make his or her parents proud (0.81)*
- » *Parents' duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being (0.57)*
- » *Divorce is never justifiable (0.56)*
- » *If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems (0.49)*
- » *One must always love and respect one's parents regardless of their behaviour (0.45)*
- » *Family is very important in respondent's life (0.43)*
- » *Respondent favours having a relatively large number of children (0.40)*

## 'FAMILY' CORRELATES OF SURVIVAL VERSUS SELF-EXPRESSION VALUES

Survival values emphasis the following:

- » *A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled (0.83)*
- » *A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily (0.73)*
- » *One must always love and respect one's parents regardless of their behaviour (0.71)*
- » *When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women (0.69)*
- » *A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl (0.67)*
- » *Hard work is one of the most important things to teach a child (0.64)*
- » *Imagination is not one of the most important things to teach a child (0.62)*
- » *Tolerance and respect for others are not the most important things to teach a child (0.62)*

Box 2: The importance of family values in modernisation and post-modernisation (source: Inglehart, Welzel, 2005, p. 53-56)

These lists suggest that values relating to families are more important for the shift from survival to self-expression values than for the shift from traditional to secular-rational values, since almost all values in the list for the first dimension (modernisation) correlate less strongly than all values in the list for the second dimension (post-modernisation). The only exception to this is the first value in the list for the first dimension (modernisation), 'one of respondent's main goals has been to make his or her parents proud', which correlates strongly to traditional values. The one item that is found in both lists, 'one must always love and respect one's parents regardless of their behaviour' mirrors these findings as it has a correlation of 0.71 to the second dimension (post-modernisation), but of only 0.45 to the first dimension (modernisation). The overall outcome of this is that family values do not change so much with secularisation, but with individualisation.

These findings support the Turkish students' view that the relation between religion and family values is weaker than the Tilburg scientists suggest. In this respect it was extremely positive to have an exchange partner with a non-Christian background. The discussion of this issue did not only deepen the cultural understanding of the student teachers of both countries involved but it also showed the power of theories over people's thinking. The Turkish students' view definitely enriched the European perspective to an extent that the European theoretical approach did not provide for, but that was included in the more globally oriented theoretical understanding of the World Values Studies.

Both these incidences show how theory can play a crucial role in teaching and in better understanding the world. If the theoretical background does not fit either the subject or the everyday experience of the people involved it will only serve

to create uneasiness and frustration in lesson planning and in teaching. In the long run, this may lead to a reluctance of the student teachers to use theory at all – even though, strictly speaking, the usage of theory cannot be avoided as we use it all the time, even if it is inadequate. To address this issue teacher trainers have to be well aware of the power of theory and the pitfalls of employing it thoughtlessly.