

European Studies*

A subject devised by the European Association of Teachers and its application to the Irish curriculum (1988)

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As Europeans we have devoted singularly little time and effort to the study of the continent, peoples, cultures and organisations of Europe. We dip into the subject in geography, history, European languages and maybe through literature, and perhaps pay a little lip-service through civics but there is no co-ordinated study programme or pattern to teaching knowledge and understanding of our own continent. Is it because we have become parochial, or somewhat shy of differences since the last war and the advent of the EC, or is it better not to perpetuate ideological divisions of looking too closely at the sides of the 'Cold War' and the nuclear arms issues? Whatever the reason, it is long since time that the position was remedied. The problem is that, like so many other topics, no two European countries seem to be able to agree on how to study their own continent, so many possible approaches have been suggested by different countries and organisations. Where, you would be justified in asking, has this led us? The answer is a pitifully short distance over a long period of time. This article is devoted to scanning the origins of European Studies and its development, but most importantly of all to introducing the idea that the subject can successfully taught in our schools alongside and along with existing subjects without in any way compromising them. In fact, the main point is that European Studies only serve to enrich our study and our curriculum.

First of all, a very brief background: it seems that the first serious attempt to address the problem of profound ignorance among school students (and the European population at large) about even the most basic things European, (like where you would find Belgium on a map or what is the capital of Norway or where you might look for the Eiffel Tower) was made in Malahide, Co. Dublin in 1965. In the Grand Hotel, the European Association of Teachers and the Council of Europe held a conference at which European Studies was adopted as a 'good idea' to be implemented by members in their education systems. So what has been happening, you might wonder, for the last 25 years. Personally I had no idea (to my shame, as a history and civics teacher) until two years ago that such courses actually existed. The European Schools Day Essay competition and, a talk by 'somebody in Europe' was as far as our participation had ever really gone (that is aside from the frantically fumbled last twenty years of the Intermediate history course in May each year - go on, admit it!) So off I went to London to a European Association of Teachers (EAT from here on, despite the unfortunate acronym) Conference to find out more in 1986.

In fact the Council of Europe had held a series of conferences from the 1960s to 'M which culminated in the publication of their findings entitled *Against Bias and Prejudice - the Council of Europe's work on History Teaching and History Textbooks* in 1986. A very interesting conference in Germany in 1979 on the theme 'Co-operation in Europe since 1945, as presented in resources for the teaching of history, geography and civics in Secondary Schools' had come up with some relevant findings - their aims and objectives included the desire to teach tolerance through studying other countries in Europe- and their co-operation since 1945. One of the most interesting conclusions was that students should have a social, cultural and economic awareness of the position of Europe in the world and that they should be aware of their common cultural heritage- which they shared as Europeans. The ideas were carried forward into the book and gave much food for thought.

The EAT conference or less grandiosely, international working group on European Studies, looked at the development of European Studies over two decades, and examined progress in the subject, new directions and drew up a teachers' handbook to facilitate the teaching of the subject. As Irish representative, I quickly became aware that we as a country had ceased our membership of EAT as soon as we joined the EC, a rather curious move in the light of our new and broader European role. Since then our contact has been through the UK section of EAT which had invited Irish participation in the conference.

Consensus was fairly easily established on several basic points which made the drawing up of the teachers' handbook much easier. It was agreed that European Studies should be taught in all secondary schools in all European countries, whether as a separate discipline or as part of other subjects or again as an inter-disciplinary topic, module or subject. The teaching of basic European information was the vital thing. Ideally, European Studies would best be taught as an autonomous subject with an inter-disciplinary character, though realistically it might well form part of other subjects for the time being. It certainly offers great scope as a possible option in the Transition Year Option.

In the context of history and of *STAIR* in particular, we need to look at European Studies as it might influence history courses or be approached by history teachers. Although some of the principal ideas for the course came from the geographers, I see no difficulty here as I believe in the very strong connections between history and geography as disciplines. The teacher handbook which came out at this conference and which is entitled: *Towards a Common Basic Knowledge of Modern Europe*, (EAT, London, 1986) sets out in tabulated form the approaches which teachers might take to this subject. It also lays down two levels of difficulty of study for which the EAT issues

certificates on completion of a set exam. The book aims to take students at the beginning of secondary schooling and give them a basic knowledge which deepens as the years progress to include issues, themes and travel. As such the course is progressive and fairly prescriptive, though the tangents and suggestions along the way give the teacher ideas and starting points rather than a curricular strait-jacket. Let us look at some of its suggestions.

The handbook consists of eight suggested areas of study followed by seven appendices which give insights and suggestions to the teacher for further study and methods to use, 'resources which will help, etc.

1. General:

Basic knowledge of Europe; identifying countries on the map, locating cities, islands, sea areas, principal physical features, capitals, ports, etc. Experience has revealed great areas of ignorance with regard to knowing where places are. Study moves on to currency, language, head of state, type of government, population size, etc. of say a sample list of 10 or 12 countries from across the continent. Students can find most of this information themselves and move quickly on. Traditions of different countries and preparations for travel to them provide interesting stages of discovery.

2. Effects of the Second World War:

To help the student understand the current map of Europe as it has changed and evolved since World War 1; new areas, changed boundaries, east/west divisions, position of Germany, Berlin, etc. Knowledge of post-war recovery and international organisations in Europe (OECD, Council of Europe, Comecon, EC, EFTA, NATO, Warsaw Pact, etc.) Some knowledge of the political terminology and differences of right/left should be studied here, from parties and ideologies to terms like *détente*. Use of media to be made here, TV, cuttings, etc. to illustrate points. Events and personalities since 1945 form an interesting study, area and use of previous material can now be made to consider the whys and wherefores.

*Not to be confused with the 'European Studies (Ireland and Great Britain) Project' of the Departments of Education (Dublin, Belfast and London) with which it has no direct connection.

3. The Environment:

Why the environment is relevant, why it is an increasingly important political issue; how/why to protect the local environment, starting with the home and school and developing to national environmental issues and international co-operation for the improvement of the environment. Much more obvious in continental Europe than in Ireland - your drinking water may have passed through

four countries on its route to you! Problems of pollution and industrial waste can be introduced here. Also at this point one can turn to the topics of the day like "acid rain" and post-Chernobyl problems, etc.

4. Economic Conditions Study of Contrasts:

A rich continent with extremes of wealth and poverty: where, why, etc. Climate, history, soil may influence this. Agricultural policies - national and international. Employment and unemployment: Why the trend towards unemployment? What tendencies are obvious in various economies? Are things better/worse in planned or entrepreneurial economies. What of the future of technology? Here, tourism, service industries, small businesses, etc. can be studied.

5. Minority Groups:

Important point - within Europe everyone belongs to a minority. From this vantage point other issues fall into perspective. Majorities and minorities exist within states arising from various reasons - ethnic, migration, language, religion, immigration, employment, etc. How do minority groups interact? Why do problems arise over employment, political rights, rival claims? How do we avoid confrontation, violence, etc.? Role-playing might be very valuable here, if carefully monitored.

6. Transport and Borders:

The original EEC, now properly the EC, was established by the Treaty of Rome as a Customs Union to facilitate the movement/trade of goods across areas of Europe. As 1992 approaches what has this done? The single European Act could be studied here. Only 12 (or one third) of Europe's states belong to the EC: can it accommodate more or should it? What of the other organisations: EFTA, Comecon, etc.? What are the road, rail and sea links in Europe? What are the real barriers - thought, ideology, language? This is the stuff of class debates! The basic question here is - does transport move across borders or does it take a change in attitude as well? How do we overcome the "border" of prejudice - in a European context this could be a very useful, broadening of horizons for Irish students.

7. Youth possibilities in Europe:

Exchanges, visits, youth foundations, form the basis for a more informed study through the experience of travel and meeting people. Teachers as well as students benefit from experiencing other schools and their counterparts in other countries. Over 400 students a year attend functions run by the European Youth Foundation (a section of the Council of Europe). Most current school exchanges are organised by language teachers - this could/should be broadened out: there is much to experience from sport and exploration to cultural and youth organisation exchanges. Perhaps the

majority of students have never ventured beyond their own boundaries, yet travel in these exchanges is very cheap and available. Could form the curriculum of a course in European Studies.

8. *Europe and the Wider World:*

Europe's historical and current connections with the outside world need to be looked at: followed by an examination of the problems of the world outside Europe. Foreign aid, etc. State aid v. personal giving and institutionalised charity. OECD includes USA and Japan among its members, so a wider context opens up here.

UNICEF and the whole question of UNO is another area. Study of the Loma Agreement and the Brandt Report is important to see what policy for the Third World is, from the EC standpoint, for example. The North/South dialogue on world poverty needs to be studied in this context. Examine international relations between European countries and states across the world. Peace and co-operation form a natural study area here.

The eight areas of study outlined above are complemented by a series of useful appendices which should interest the teacher about to embark on European Studies -

- (a) Teaching European Studies in a secondary school.
- (b) The Environment.
- (c) Transport.
- (d) 'Let's make radio programmes.'
- (e) The cultural inheritance of Europe.
- (f) Europe - key economic issues.
- (g) Ideas and resources.

These appendices are contributed by teachers in different countries and bring a sometimes refreshing look at the topics which we might have begun to find stale or tedious.

Suggestions were made by some delegates about radio/video/tape links between schools and already I have experimented with this suggestion and found it very useful. Views of different school students can start a lively discussion and of course replies, when transmitted by tape or radio or television.

The scope is there for great inter-disciplinary co-operation between, for example, languages, history, geography, music, art, civics departments and cross-subject projects are a strong possibility. Every school will approach it differently- but the course can be used -

- (a) By itself as an area of study, taking the two levels, tests and gaining certificates;
- (b) As a module within civics, whether project based or activity oriented;

- (c) As a history or geography adjunct or as a joint topic used by teachers of both subjects;
- (d) As a feature of a language, music or art course or as a theme running through some or all of these for a few weeks or even a term. Time can be utilised so that extra time does not need to be found. One or two staff 'planning lunches' could settle a very profitable and successful experiment along these lines.
- (e) As a basis for arranging contacts and/or exchanges with other schools in other countries, starting perhaps at teacher level.

A basic broadening of factual information therefore can rapidly become a very interesting part of the curriculum and the basis for all sorts of educational activity. It is ideal for the TYO and very useful for all levels where a subject needs refreshing. The new Junior Certificate may also have a place for this kind of study. And besides, think how much more interesting the last few years of history can be made if you use one of the approaches suggested above.

If you would like more information on the book, syllabus, sample articles and certificates, write to me at Alexandra College, Dublin 6, or direct to Miss Mary Duce (UK Secretary of EAT) 20, Brookfield, Highgate West Hill, London N6 6AS. And before you ask, the teachers' handbook is £2 sterling plus postage. It is hoped to update the 1986 ideas and publish further material in the near future; how near depends on finance and availability of delegates.