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What maps don't say: introducing student teachers to the analysis of the mismatches between cultural and political frontiers in Europe

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Introduction

The consolidation of nation states and the reshaping of frontiers in the 19th and 20th centuries left cultural and linguistic minorities within many national borders. The cultural homogenisation of these states was reinforced by compulsory schooling, an instrument used to promote national identity and the use of a common language; the basic concepts and values of the 'common' culture were also conveyed by the establishment of a centralised teacher training system. Schooling erased differences between citizens, but also disguised the problems and complaints of the minorities. Pedagogical literature contains many examples of how, in different countries, minority languages were forbidden in the classrooms and of the wide range of punishments for those who dared to speak a 'different' language. Many such languages continued in use, at least to some extent, but others suffered a process of marginalisation, being confined to domestic use; others have disappeared, and with them very old cultural heritages.

Concern about cultural diversity, and the political balance between states and particular regions, is increasing as European integration helps to override national borders and opens a new process of spatial recomposition. Mismatches between state citizenship and cultural identities in the new Europe have to be taken into account and clarified at all levels, now that the European Convention has started its work.

Maps, a truncated drawing of reality

Maps, with their very powerful images, convey knowledge and play an important role not only in the learning of geographical concepts but also in the construction of ideas; concepts and ideas which come from the society in which they are made (Harley, 1996). A map can also contain bias and transmit values, consciously or otherwise. The lines, names and details convert maps into a truncated drawing of reality.

Political maps provide a good example of these effects. The frontiers and names convey cultural and historical values and can be used as ideological discourses; they introduce young people into an existing political order. Whilst Palestine is missing from Israeli maps, Israel has disappeared from Palestinian ones. This also happens in other countries with disputes about territorial borders: the drawing of those borders can be different depending which side produces the map, as in the cases of Western Sahara, Kashmir or the Malvinas (or Falkland Islands). "…if one starts drawing a map without his neighbour country, it may be the first step in erasing it from the world" (Muñoz Molina, 2002). The image of political maps, those colourful patchworks hanging on the classroom wall, were for many people the only mental image of the world. The changes in the map of Europe around 1993 helped us to realise that maps are not the representation of a permanent reality (Villanueva & Gonzalo, 2001).

The realities hidden by the convention of borders was our starting point in analysing some of the mismatches between the political shape of the European territory and the social and cultural realities. In a geography course developed in the framework of European

citizenship education, we carried out an exercise of map deconstruction using the spatial distribution of European languages as the focus. This exercise raised issues such as nationality, cultural identity, minority rights and citizenship, and helped to open a stimulating debate about European cultural diversity. The target group was primary school student teachers at the Faculty of Education of the Universitat Autonoma of Barcelona. The work has a special interest as it was carried out in a region with its own particular cultural identity within the larger state; this provided the opportunity to use local experience to analyse a global issue.

Languages as a key element in the understanding of European diversity

Language is the clearest and most evident sign of a particular culture. Behind language there is a complex system which relates a human group with a common history, traditions and values: this is why language is one of the strongest and deepest sign not only of personal identity but also of the feeling of belonging to a definite group. Both elements are basic for personal integration in a community and for assuming additional identities as citizens - of a country, of a state, of the European Union, and of the world.

Students were given a political map of Europe and a pack of stickers on which all the languages currently spoken in Europe were written. There were several stickers for each language as the number of regions in which it is spoken could vary, and a linguistic area does not necessarily fit inside a single state border. That means that, for example, there were French stickers for France, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium - and Briton, Corsican, Catalan, Basque, Occitan, Italian, Flemish and German stickers for France. Students were asked to place stickers in the correct regions. After a few minutes, all the main languages were correctly placed in the states: English in the UK, German in Germany, Polish in Poland, Magyar in Hungary and so on. But where to place the remaining stickers? Why were they given so many stickers for each language?

Some of the languages, like Romani and Yiddish, were difficult to locate for historical reasons. Other languages offered difficulties: students were discovering languages that they had never heard of (Gaelic, Carelian...), or that were almost unknown to them (Briton, Lapon…). Some research at the library was required to complete the exercise. It was quite easy for them to fit the different languages inside the borders of a state (e.g. Welsh, Scottish and English in the UK) but locating others was not so simple (Basque, Catalan, Magyar, Albanese, Swedish…) because their areas of influence were clearly crossing state borders.

The students were asked then to produce a transparent film showing the map of linguistic areas map, and to overlay it with the political map, which showed a very different pattern of European territory. It was obvious that it was difficult to match the two; there were very few cases (Portugal, Iceland) in which a whole country spoke the same language; the most common situation was plenty of mismatches. At this stage in the exercise, it was helpful to look to history in an attempt to understand some of the reasons. The students worked through a chronological series of historical maps, starting with the Roman Empire, and looked at maps from 1000, 1500, 1815, 1914, 1925, 1945 and 1993. To add depth to the exercise, students also analysed four series of maps: the Scandinavian countries 1700-1917; Germany 1933-1946; the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1815-1925); and Poland (1815-1945). Students learned about the complexity of the issue and to what extent political borders are conventional, that the shape of states has changed and that political

units have appeared and disappeared in the course of history. Poland is an excellent example: Polish people have lived for centuries in territories which are now included in Belarus, Ukraine or Lithuania.

Subsequent discussion focussed on the questions of why we simply match France with French, the United Kingdom with English, Spain with Spanish, etc, and what is the origin of this bias in the face of European diversity. The development of present states during the 18th and 19th centuries was examined, and students recognised that not all European nationalities emerged with a national state, although some (for example France, Spain and Italy) prevailed with their language established as the official one. However, the mosaic of languages is a clear demonstration of the non-homogeneous nature of European nation-states; many countries are still culturally plural, even if the school systems have been serving the idea of a monolingual national society (Reid, E. 1999).

The next step was to reflect on the students' own experience through the analysis of the characteristics and the relationship between the two main linguistic communities in Catalonia.

The unstable balance of cultural coexistence: the example of Catalonia

Present-day Spanish society is the result of a historical melting that has left, within its political borders, different languages and great regional diversity. Since 1978, Spain has been ruled by a Constitutional Law which defined autonomous regions that in most cases have their historical origin in former kingdoms. Each of these autonomous communities is ruled by a Statutory Law and has its own Parliament and Government. The official language of the state is Spanish but there are five communities which each have their own language - these were forbidden during the military dictatorship (1939-1975). The establishment of democracy represented a turning point: the new Constitution gave these tongues the status of co-official languages in their own regions, which means that they are taught in the schools as a first or second language. This has engendered hope for the recovery of these languages; although they were widely spoken, very few people were able to read or write them.

Catalonia, a good example of a mixed-culture society, has six million inhabitants, 70% of whom are clustered within a 30-km radius of Barcelona, the capital city. Catalan is the language of the region[1]. Between 1950 and 1970, more than 500,000 immigrants from the largely rural southern regions of Spain came to Catalonia and were pushed into speaking another language, into an unfamiliar industrial environment, and very often into the slums and suburban ghettos of the metropolitan area. Today, about 40% of the population is descended from these migratory movements, which has deeply marked present Catalan society. (Gonzalo & Villanueva, 1996). The coexistence of two different languages in the same territory and the maintenance and balance of cultural diversity has constituted one of the main challenges of the educational system. Catalan has been taught in schools as a first language since 1978, alongside Spanish, which is introduced in the first level of primary school. Although this has worked well in general, it has not completely resolved

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[1] Catalan is also spoken in other regions of Spain (Valencia and the Balearic Islands), in the small state of Andorra and in the French region of Roussillon

questions relating to the different cultures and from time to time tensions arise between the linguistic communities which question the possibility of a real balance between different languages in the same territory.

Some of the results of twenty years of linguistic freedom have been analysed. A survey carried out by the Linguistic Directorate of the Catalan Government (1996) shows that the evolution of the population's abilities in the Catalan language has been as follows:

	1975 (%)	1986 (%)	1996 (%)
Understanding	74.5	90.61	94.97
Speaking	53.1	64.08	75.30
Reading	--	60.56	72.35
Writing	14.5	31.53	45.84

The children of the immigrants of the 1960s have learned Catalan at school and as the data show the percentage of the population able to understand the language has increased to 95% (Farras et al. 1996); reading and speaking abilities have both increased, and writing ability, which had the lowest figures, has made the largest increase in competence. Many Catalan speakers did not previously have the opportunity of studying their own language, and those who did were self-learners or were taught mainly in the family or in very reduced and almost clandestine circles. Until the 1970s the majority of the Catalan community used only Spanish in their writing.

There are other aspects of interest: it may be that the most relevant data shows not just the capability of speaking and understanding a language, but its social use, and in this respect the situation is not so promising. The survey showed that 53.1% of the population uses mainly Catalan in daily life, 30.4 % mainly Spanish and 16.3% both languages interchangeably. However, the last sociological report on language use (Giner, 2002) undertaken in the metropolitan region of Barcelona, concluded that on average 65% of the population uses Spanish as the language of choice and 33% uses Catalan. The highest percentage of use of Spanish is recorded in those areas affected by the immigration waves of the 1960s and where the average rises to 78%. In other areas the average of the use of Catalan is very much higher, increasing to 85% in towns and villages of 15,000 inhabitants or less. Similar results can be observed in other Spanish regions where Catalan is spoken (Valencia and the Balearic Islands).

It can be concluded that 25 years of democratic schooling have been very important in increasing knowledge of Catalan and in ensuring its future, but the impact has not been strong enough to change language habits. The third generation of immigrants are Spanish speakers in daily life in spite of being able to use the Catalan language if required, and complaints appear from time to time about Catalan being taught in schools and questioning the usefulness of learning a "minority language".

Despite expectations, the use of Catalan as a first language is not increasing but is slowly decreasing. The mass media uses Spanish - double the number of free TV channels, triple the number of newspapers, 95% of cinema - which also plays also an important role in the spread and prevalence of the most powerful language.

After the map: final reflections

The aim of the map exercise was to try an alternative way of looking at the map of Europe; the information students found and the ideas which arose in discussion were rich enough for us to consider it a useful tool for the training of teachers as concerned European citizens.

Diversity seems to be the most fashionable word in Europe. At all levels and especially in education, it is difficult to find a project where European "unity" and "diversity" are not in the list of key words. Several relevant political initiatives demonstarte this: the Council of Europe established the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (Strasbourg 1992) which was followed by the Charter of Minority Rights (1994). The European Union, in its Charter of Fundamental Rights (Nice 2000) includes in Chapter III two articles on non-discrimination and cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Although many countries have already signed these Charters, it could be said that progress is more symbolic than effective: general agreements and recommendations seem to be insufficient without the implementation of specific policies.

We conclude that the coexistence of different languages - different cultures - in the same territory should not be taken for granted, as the case of Catalonia demonstrates. Even with the existence of regulations, the progress of Catalan is very slow and the balance with the dominant culture is unstable. In other European countries in which different languages are spoken, the situation appears to be very diverse. In Switzerland, four languages coexist, but one is clearly broadening its area; in the United Kingdom, there is a long way to go with Welsh and Scottish, not to mention the slow recovery of Gaelic in the Republic of Ireland; in Belgium coexistence is based in a sharp linguistic barrier.

It is commonly accepted that the preservation of minorities is of great interest, but the concept of 'minority' is very complex, as complex are the different situations. Examples such as Val d'Aosta, Catalonia, South Tyrol (or the Alto Adige), Wales, Occitania, and Lapland have some aspects in common, but there is sufficient significant difference, from the regional, the numerical and the social points of view, to make the establishment of common and simple policies problematic. The challenge for the future the challenge will be to discover new and more imaginative ways of managing the European Union, and of coping with the multi-cultural needs and demands of new Europeans.

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