The first meeting of EUROPLAT partners in July during glorious Edinburgh sunshine was an important milestone in the EUROPLAT programme. So what did we achieve? First and foremost the meeting provided an opportunity for us to get to know each other a little. As the photographs reveal there were plentiful opportunities to climb fire escapes, share food, dance and talk.

Locating the meeting within the Psychology Learning and Teaching (PLAT) conference enabled participants to experience, some for the first time, a research led conference dedicated to the teaching and learning of psychology. The presentations, demonstrations, panels and posters provided a mixture of research interventions, exemplars of effective practice and rich debate. Many of the issues covered within the conference were without borders, for example, the development of psychological literacy in students, the evaluation of teaching effectiveness and enhancing learning through the use of technology.

The publication of this edition of the newsletter coincides with the delivery of the project Exploitation Plan which will be sent out to partners to support you in raising awareness of the project in your own country.

The next time that we meet as a group will be in July 2011 at the European Congress of Psychology in Istanbul. There is much work to be done by all of us before then if we are going to build a robust and sustainable network for improving the quality of psychology education across the European Community.
The immediate tasks for EUROPLAT partners

**Develop the EUROPLAT network within our countries**

Andrejs Ozolins provided us with some useful examples of national dissemination strategies which can be employed to extend the network:

- exploiting national committees and students organisations,
- disseminating information to other universities and departments with programmes related to psychology,
- promoting EUROPLAT to the business community,
- getting in touch with organisation that can join the project as associate partners.

**Disseminate survey**

The current survey seeks to establish a baseline measure of the state of innovation in teaching psychology across Europe.

**National web page**

Contribute to developing your national web page on the EUROPLAT by providing information about the structure and organisation of teaching psychology, submitting materials related to teaching and learning psychology, and producing a short (100 seconds) video file about psychology education in each country.

**ECP2011**

Consider submitting an abstract to the teaching and learning strand of ECP2011. The deadline is the 30th November 2010. If you are interested in organising a workshop or symposium at the ECP please contact Annie Trapp at a.trapp@psych.york.ac.uk before 30th September 2010.

The PLAT 2010 presentations and a slide show of conference photos are available on line at [www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010](http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010). Thanks to our partners in Salzburg we will also be putting the slideshows and presentations for the EUROPLAT sessions on line. Conference photos can be viewed at [www.europlat.org/europlat2010_pictures/album/index.html](http://www.europlat.org/europlat2010_pictures/album/index.html).

As the conference was the first opportunity to discuss many of the project objectives, activities and outputs with many of you, it might have raised new questions and ideas about the project. If you would like to make any comments, raise particular issues or would like more specific guidance and advice including project management please get in touch with Anna or Nick.
While various disciplines have their own didactics as a fixed sub-discipline, Psychology still lacks a canonized field in its teaching and learning. Especially in different fields of Science, the so-called “Sputnik-Shock” (as emphasized in the Western world) has led to independent majors like Didactics of Biology or Didactics of Physics etc. (cf. Krapp, Prenzel & Weidenmann, 2006; Timmerhaus, 2001).

Although these areas have a strong relationship to their topic, they can be mainly characterized by being a stand-alone discipline with interdisciplinary characteristics. Research in these fields is determined by the strong relationship to the superordinate discipline and the involvement of Pedagogic and Educational Psychology. In international research, quantitative and qualitative Social Sciences research methods are dominating meanwhile.

A comparison of the Didactics of psychology with other Didactics (e.g., in sciences or languages) reveals that this field seems to be rather at its beginning. Although there are already some relevant textbooks, journals e.g. PLAT - Psychology Learning and Teaching (accessed from: www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk) and research, the scene seems to be in its development rather than being a sophisticated discipline. But why is that? There might be several answers to this question. First of all, comparing the history of Psychology with other disciplines, its history is rather short. Second, the extent to which Psychology is also a topic in secondary school – if it is implemented at all – varies within countries but is comparably smaller than other subjects like languages, mathematics or others. Third, there might be a missing identity of this Psychological sub-discipline itself: What is the nature of a Didactics of Psychology and how is it related to other Psychological subjects?

In order to identify this nature, we can orient ourselves by the dominating paradigms within Psychology. In addition, heterogeneity of single Psychological sub-disciplines have to be taken into account, their genuine nature as well as their common factors. This is already a difficult task: which areas and subjects are fields of Psychology, which are marginal in and which not and might rather be related to other disciplines (e.g., refer to Educational Sciences rather than to Psychology)?

But let us search for the core, the heart of what unifies us under the label “Psychology”. This core is what we would like to call the Epistemology of our discipline. This construct highlights that our subject is an empirical discipline, which is based upon insights from observation and assessment as well as interpretation of human acting, thinking and feeling. According to Zimbardo and Gerrig (2008), psychology is the discipline of scientific investigation of individuals and their mental processes. The methodology here is a central issue which unifies all psychological sub-disciplines. Epistemology of the discipline is based upon this methodology. Thus, a central concern of a Didactics of Psychology must be to use that methodology as well as to teach it, e.g., to evaluate progress or to assess specific methods used in the psychology classroom. Although this is a standard approach in the educational research, it still seems to be an exception in psychology (e.g., there are scarce empirical contributions in recent international research proceedings like McCarthy & Newstead, 2007; McCarty & Karandashev, 2009).

Beside the methodology the different disciplines of psychology have to be considered in a Didactics of psychology. Each single subject also has its own methodological approaches but also overlaps with other ones or is based on basic disciplines of Psychology. Beside methodology, basic and applied subjects, a third core of a Didactics of Psychology is the method of teaching and learning. This implies that one major aim should be to suggest suit-
able methods in order to support an active and holistic way of learning within our field. This requires a differential and carefully planned approach as suggested in current Instructional Design methodology. Accordingly, a Didactics of Psychology has to address different target groups, their demands, characteristics and needs. This involves not only the difference between secondary and tertiary education but also different audiences within one institution (e.g. Psychology as major, as minor or as supplement, e.g., for student teachers). Even target groups outside of institutionalized Psychology education have to be addressed (e.g., patients in psychotherapy confronted with patient information).

Fostering a Didactics of Psychology on a European level opens many chances to overcome this very first initial stage of founding a new discipline. A European level has many advantages compared to national approaches. First, education within Europe has become more and more of an international rather than a national developmental process (e.g., the Bologna reforms, the European Qualification Framework, EQF, cf. European Commission, 2010 or the EuroPsy-Certificate; http://www.efpa.eu/europsy). Second, exchange across borders is in the scientific world nowadays a sine qua non.

What is standard in the discipline of Psychology has also to be standard in the Didactics of Psychology, leading to professionalization through international exchange. Such a development would be hardly possible on a national level. By going internationally, didactical developments from one country could also be implemented in another one; cultural diversity can be regarded as well as acknowledged and, thus, improve the field. This also includes different school and university systems as well as methodological innovations on a curricula level.

If this cooperation and collaboration on an international level could be fostered, a kind of intercultural peer-learning might result with each partner gaining benefits. Here, we can assume that specific cultural approaches and perspectives on a national level could go hand-in-hand with a European perspective.

European Psychology Learning and Teaching (EUROPLAT; www.europlat.org) is a major chance but also a challenge to foster the Didactics of Psychology on a European and also on national levels. Europlat offers the chance to make the Didactics of Psychology grow and become an established sub-discipline of Psychology. A first step is done.

References


Academic dishonesty can take several forms. The most common include: cheating in an exam, copying text or ideas, buying an essay, fabricating data, and presenting personal circumstances in a distorted light to get an extension on deadline. Plagiarism and dishonesty can be perceived differently depending on the cultural context and the educational level (primary, secondary or tertiary). At the university level the problem should be treated seriously and everything needs to be done to limit it. Academic dishonesty can seriously affect the outcome of the research and lead to faulty data. On the other hand, the process of detecting cheating can be very time consuming and can in fact prove overwhelming to a lecturer who deals with hundreds of students. So what can be done to manage dishonesty efficiently?

Prepare exams well, and give clear guidance as to what material will be covered in the examination. Exams that are too hard can sprout the idea among students that the only way to pass them is by cheating. Also too harsh marking can provoke frustration among students; the next time they may arrive at the exam well equipped to do better! To reduce the possibility of cheating in the examination room prepare different versions of multiple-choice exams (if used) and provide a choice of essay questions.

Give clear time frame for assignments. Lack of time can provoke dishonesty therefore training students on their own time management could be very helpful. They can learn how to better prepare and plan their assessments if deadlines are given for the consecutive stages of work.

To avoid plagiarism and literally copying from other sources underline the importance of learning how to use quotations, footnotes and how to prepare the reference list. Provide students with links to referencing guides which are widely used at your institution. Run an exercise on how to paraphrase the same paragraph and compare the results in the class. Also, make students aware of the fact that what can be considered common knowledge by some may be a new fact to others. Train students how to assess these differences properly.

Examples of how to set assignments:

- To discourage copying material that already exists, avoid setting the same title as last year. Although setting a new assessment every year can be time consuming try to vary and mix coursework assessments task.
- If appropriate switch to oral examination.
- Set non standard word/page length, lower than in the past.
- Make a distinction between essays that require the re-presentation of material and those that require critical and independent thinking.
- Design assessments that require students to apply their knowledge to new situations rather then using tired familiar essay titles.

Fabricating data

All researchers are aware of how data fabrication can damage research. To prevent students from fabricating data ask them to:

- Present raw data
- Keep laboratory notebooks
- Notify you about the date and time data collection occurs
- Keep participants’ consent forms

Software detection methods

The use of software detection methods (e.g. Turnitin) has become common in many universities.
According to researchers of criminology the risk of being caught is more important as a deterrent than the penalty. Therefore using software can be very effective in fighting plagiarism. To give students a better idea of how to keep clear of plagiarism give them an opportunity to use the system themselves before submitting an essay.

It is important that students are made aware of the institutional rules regarding plagiarism. These rules should be clearly set out and students who are caught cheating need to know where to seek advice and support. Penalties in such instances should be proportional to the offence. Institutions using too limited a range of penalties (e.g. expulsion in most instances) may be inappropriate. In some cases, especially for younger students, the penalty exists to serve as an educational agent. Only if the offence occurs repeatedly, should a student face the full consequences. Finally, lecturers should adhere to the same rules as their students. Setting an example by personally following and taking these rules seriously will help to foster high standards and an ethos of honesty among the whole academic society.

This draws on previously published material on plagiarism that can be found on Higher Education Academy Psychology Network web page:

http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/s.php?p=144&db=12
and
http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/academic_integrity_page.pdf

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**Innovative Partner stories within the field of teaching and curriculum**

**Turkey – Prof. Nebi Sümer,**  
Department of Psychology  
Middle East Technical University

The Center for Learning and Student Development at Middle East Technical University (METU) organizes an annual week long “Effective Teaching Orientation Seminar” for all new faculty. The experts on teaching as well as experienced faculty give seminars and workshops on the following titles:

- becoming an instructor/faculty at METU
- ethics at the university
- effective teaching strategies
- effective communication in education
- assessing the progress and achievement
- examples of exams and a grading system
- using technology in teaching.

The faculty and instructors who were hired in the previous academic year participate in these activities and evaluate the effectiveness of the programme at the end of the week. Last February, 35 new faculty participated in the programme and evaluated it using 5 point scales. They indicated that they benefitted from the seminars on “effective teaching strategies” and graded the usefulness of the sessions at 4.16 and “using technology in teaching” at 4.15.
The Department of Psychology at the University of Malta was established in 1988. Members of the department feel that we have managed to develop a strong and stimulating department with high levels of quality lecturing and research. Students have on various occasions provided the lecturing staff with positive feedback especially with regard to the lecturers’ way of integrating theory with their own practical experience during lectures. The department has members of staff who are very committed in affecting policy makers in the area of the family, mental health, inclusive education, child development and children with developmental difficulties as well as issues of multi-ethnicity.

This is a department in which we strive to make the students feel respected and supported and where ethical issues are constantly held in high regard at all levels. We have a system where students are encouraged to give feedback to the lecturers, through online anonymous questionnaires, but most of all our students are encouraged to talk to lecturers directly should they have any difficulty and if they feel that this has not solved their problem they may talk to the course coordinator, then the Head of Department, the Dean etc. Student feedback is constantly sought after and respected through formal and informal meetings. Students have active elected representatives who sit on their respective board of studies. We also organise a yearly meeting between our students and the external examiner, who is invited to review our course, students’ work and therefore ultimately evaluates our psychology graduates. This happens both at undergraduate and post graduate level.

Our graduates write back to us telling us how well prepared they feel for their post graduate studies. We try to prepare our students to work on their own initiative as well as part of a team from the very first year of studies. Many of our students have not as yet developed good writing skills and they have found the study unit ‘Writing and Argumentative skills’ particularly useful for their individual and work group. They are individually involved, in producing various short assignments in preparation of their 12 ECTS dissertation. Their development in working in groups culminates in the third year as part of an 8 ECTS study unit called Symposia in Psychology. This involves the students in an in-depth critical analysis of psychological theory linked to the Maltese context through practical research. Each group presents their work to the whole class and all students are then examined on the vast material produced by the students with the appropriate feedback from the lecturers.

The department also hosts the Programme for Inclusive Education and is also responsible for the masters in counselling course. The programmes of study offered by the department at both undergraduate and post graduate level, therefore reflect this interdisciplinary. These include:

- Bachelor in Psychology (Honours)
- Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) (Offered at the University of Malta Gozo Campus)
- Bachelor of Arts (Psychology)
- Bachelor of Education (Personal and Social Development)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Personal and Social Development)
- Conversion Course
- Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education
- Master in Psychology
- Master in Counselling
- Master in Inclusive Education and Communities
Contributions

If you would like to contribute an article to the next edition of a newsletter please submit it to Nick or Anna. All contributions are welcome.

Clarifications

In the May issue we mistakenly ascribed the authorship of the story from Poland “The educational path in applied psychology”. We apologise to Prof. Lidia Cierpiälkowska who was the true author of the story.

Feedback

If you have a suggestion, can think of doing things better, would like to comment on anything, please feel free to contact Anna or Nick.

What to do next?

Consult the partner’s guide, sent out together with this newsletter.

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