

# Specific Competences and Cognitive Procedures for Literary Studies in b-Learning

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## Introduction

The Tuning Model for European Comparable Degrees<sup>1</sup> developed a generic program for the identification of social needs, the definition of academic and professional profiles at European level, and the translation of these requirements into desired learning outcomes. Nowadays we need a more precise and critical frame to focus on European Literary Studies specificity, particularly in Open and Distance Education.

Transparency and coherence are required in any kind of learning design. Thus some key questions such as who determines the object and the methodology employed, that is to say, knowledge and contents, socio-cultural competences and procedures, values and attitudes, need to be posed. To do that, we must take into account the specific professional competences required from new learners of literature courses and the specific cognitive procedures that should be activated particularly by ODL systems to achieve these professional requirements. We would like to demonstrate and justify the argument that complex cognitive and metacognitive capacities which used to remain passive in the printed paradigm can now be activated and become functional in virtual environments within our contemporary digital paradigm.

Our reflection is based on the LEETHi group experience for the last five years<sup>2</sup> and on the process of adaptation of the Faculty of Arts in Complutense University (U.C.M.) to a b-learning model<sup>3</sup>. Some data about our University and our Faculty could help us to understand the dimensions of the bet.

	<i>U.C.M.</i>	<i>Faculty of Arts</i>
<b>Number of Students</b>	91.598	3.065
<b>Number of Teachers</b>	5.989	327
<b>Number of Departments</b>	233	13

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* [resource on line] <[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html)>

<sup>2</sup> See Asunción López-Varela's contribution in this volume: "B-learning Approaches to the Teaching of Literature in the UCM within the framework of the European Space for Higher Education" ([http://www.openlit.gr/papers/Lopez\\_Varela\\_Asuncion.pdf](http://www.openlit.gr/papers/Lopez_Varela_Asuncion.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> The author of this paper is the coordinator of the Virtual Campus for all the Faculty of Arts. All the data about the functioning of the Faculty of Arts are collected from internal documents, as the *Memoria 2004-2005. Facultad de Filología*, Madrid, Facultad de Filología, 2005, and from the U.C.M. Web page <<http://www.ucm.es/info/ucmp/pags.php?tp=Datos%20estad%EDsticos&a=presenta&d=0000691.php>>

	<i>U.C.M.</i>	<i>Faculty of Arts</i>
<b>Number of Degrees</b>	77	12
<b>Languages/literatures taught <sup>4</sup></b>		38
<b>Virtual Courses</b>	2.932	177

### **Some challenges for Higher Education and Literary Studies**

It is neither the time nor the place to analyze the transformation that is taking place in Humanities and Higher Education in Europe, but we may consider some challenges as a starting point of our reflection.

All of us are conscious of literature's everlasting dependence on supporting material and technologies. Firstly, safeguarding literatures and keeping them accessible is not a trivial task, especially not in the digital age. We really care about literatures that will not be able to be transferred to electronic supports, since they will become invisible and will fall into oblivion. The decisions about authors and works will have an aesthetic and ideological character, and their reach will be political and cultural. Secondly, as it is said, information and communication technologies should be able to transcend the limitations of the human mind. Nevertheless, for the time being, we observe that hardware technology has grown exponentially, but not its software applications, thus the result is linear with regard to the progress of the art.

In any case, we don't know exactly what kind of new *wreaders*— our students- are growing in these new polydialogical spaces where multimedia formats are interconnected: which memories and which identification processes are being shared, which cognitive activities are being developed, which seeing needs and desires of watching are being born among cyberculture's children in the different social sectors.

At the same time, we have to deal with significantly increased students' enrolments with comparatively reduced resources (in Spain at least). Countries such as the United Kingdom and Denmark have set a target of training 50% of a given age group at university level between now and 2010. The typical way of working is to give out a reading list or set of essay questions expecting that our students will know how to think, read and write. Meanwhile, the university system is about exploring and conveying key features of disciplinary content, rather than examining and modelling processes of thought and ways of interacting with or producing texts.

It is a fact, at least in the case of Spanish universities, that we no longer have full-time

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<sup>4</sup> *Planes de Estudio (Libro 5) Facultad de Filología. 2005-2006*, Madrid, UCM, 2005, *Oferta de asignaturas de libre elección. Genéricas 2005-2006*, Madrid, UCM, 2005: Acadian, Arab, Aramaic, Basque, Berber, Bulgarian, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, French, Galician, German, Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, Ancient Hebrew, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Norwegian, Persian, Phoenician, Polish, Portuguese, Provençal, Romanian, Russian, Serb, Slovak, Spanish, Syrian, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Ugaritic, Yiddish.

students, but 53% of our undergraduate students<sup>5</sup> are employed notionally part-time in order to pay for fees and living expenses, and they are lacking social aid. That is the reason why, in U.C.M., and particularly in the Faculty of Arts, we are investing on a blended learning approach with a merging of face-to-face and technology-mediated learning. The term “blended learning” has gained currency in recent years, but it remains ill-defined and the significance of the term will be discussed later.

In Europe, Higher Education is being subjected to a set of unprecedented pressures for change, linked to the perceived move to a knowledge-based society and economy, and the new role of the university in developing the required capacities of the flexible, lifelong worker/learner. The four major purposes of higher education according to the *Bologna Seminar*<sup>6</sup> are the following:

- (i) preparation for the labour market
- (ii) preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society
- (iii) personal development
- (iv) development and maintenance of an advanced knowledge base

The strategic objective for the European Union, according to the European Council (Lisbon, March 2000) is to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world”.<sup>7</sup> More precisely, the aims of the EES (European Education Space) are

both to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic.<sup>8</sup>

Real scientific and technological issues are raised in the EES: “close links will be established between the European area of lifelong learning and the European research area, particularly with a view to raising the interest of young people in science and technology careers”.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, the European Commission considers we are very far from an ideal knowledge economy:

In 2000, the proportion of 25-64 years olds in the EU having attained at least upper secondary level

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<sup>5</sup> Even more: 65% of French students, 75% of Basque and Italian Students, according to Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación, *Libro Blanco de Filología* (2006) [resource on line], <[http://www.aneca.es/modal\\_eval/conver\\_docs\\_titulos.html](http://www.aneca.es/modal_eval/conver_docs_titulos.html)>

<sup>6</sup> *Bologna Seminar on Qualification Structures in Higher Education in Europe* (Copenhagen, Denmark, 27-28 March 2003), organised by Rektorkollegiet, Socrates, and Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, p. 1., in <[http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Results\\_copenhagen.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Results_copenhagen.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, Brussels, 21.11.2001, COM (2001)678 final, p. 6, in <[http://www.ntua.gr/dep/old/International/Europe/com2001\\_0678en01.pdf](http://www.ntua.gr/dep/old/International/Europe/com2001_0678en01.pdf)>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

education was just 60.3%.[...], but almost 150 million people in the EU without this basic level of education face a higher risk of marginalisation. [...] In economic terms, the employability and adaptability of citizens is vital for Europe to maintain its commitment to becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world.<sup>10</sup>

According to the European Commission, two measures could contribute to reach this aim:

- œ First, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which “allows transfer from outside the higher education context, thus facilitating Lifelong Learning and the recognition of informal and non-formal learning” and “facilitates access to the labour market.”<sup>11</sup>
- œ Second, concrete measures of EU to promote mobility in the frame of the Bologna process are announced: Action line 4 promotes “The creation of models of European Virtual Universities, in order to offer citizens access to a Europe-wide course offer and provide incentives to combine physical and virtual mobility.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, what kind of basic capabilities are required from “responsible” citizens? Definitions of competences are not very clearly developed by the European Commission. Just an example :

“Basic skills include the foundation skills of reading, writing and mathematics, as well as learning to learn and the new skills set out at Lisbon – IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship, social skills.”<sup>13</sup>

A lot of elaboration is required as to the precise aims, competences, strategies and environments mentioned in statements such as the above. As a social practice, our teaching decisions take into consideration not only academic and pedagogical approaches but also challenging times and citizenship definitions. Nowadays, understanding learning environments is needed for enforcing a variety of demands on new academics and a huge new range of training needs and teaching competences (in planning and preparation, communication skills, interaction,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> European University Association, *Credit Transfer and Accumulation- the Challenge for Institutions and Students. EUA/Swiss Confederation Conference*. ETH Zürich, 11/12 October 2002, p. 2, in <<http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:IN1rFNCjEqIJ:www.ual.es/Universidad/Convergencia/EEES/Europa/zurich.doc+Credit+Transfer+and+Accumulation+the+Challenge+for+Institutions+and+Students.+EUA/Swiss+Confederation+Conference.+ETH+Z%C3%BCrich,+11/12+October+2002&hl=es&gl=es&ct=clnk&cd=2>>

<sup>12</sup> “The Commission proposed a new programme on e-learning programmes on 19 December 2002, addressing this need, to be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in the autumn of 2003. The programme has a focus on virtual universities.” European Commission, *From Prague to Berlin. The EU contribution. Second Progress Report*, Brussels, 15 February 2003-rev, A2/PVDH, pp. 2-3, in <[http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/updated\\_report.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/updated_report.pdf)> . “The Commission will propose that research and experimentation into how we learn in the contexts of formal, non-formal and informal learning, and how ICT can be integrated inot these learning processes, be supported under the 6<sup>th</sup> Research Framework programme, through the Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Youth programmes and the e-Learning pilot actions, the Information Society Technologies Programme and through the EQUAL Community Initiative. This should promote the development of efficient and effective pedagogic approaches for various groups of learners, including underrepresented groups/non-traditional learners.” Commission of the European Communities, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, Brussels, 21.11.2001, COM (2001)678 final, pp. 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

resources and assessment).

Transparency and coherence are required in any kind of learning design, but even more, in a blended learning model: ICT can enable new forms of teaching and learning, but we must also help both students and teachers understanding not only how to work with ICTs, but why it is beneficial to do so. We should be conscious of our disciplinary differences and disciplinary expectations. So a clear and detailed definition of educational leadership must be provided, a description of professional and academic profiles that should take into account labour market outcomes as well as the learning outcomes (concerning generic, specific and complex competences) which should be developed in an e-learning environment. These are the next steps of our contribution.

### Labour market outcomes

Our starting point is a revision of specific competences for new learners in the field of European Literatures, leading to their professional integration in the market place. Our main source is *El Libro blanco de los títulos de grado en Filología*,<sup>14</sup> a huge study prepared by a committee composed of 18 Deans of Spanish Faculties of Arts and presided over by the Dean of the Complutense Faculty of Arts. The *Libro blanco* is a comparative study of academic curricula on Arts in European countries, an analysis of needs detected by Spanish employers regarding linguistic and literary matters, a description of generic and specific competences, and a structured proposal for new curricula according to EEE and European social needs. Data was collected from 4.968 graduates of 31 Spanish universities<sup>15</sup> on 16 degrees,<sup>16</sup> between December 2004-January 2005, as well as from 298 employers who responded to the survey.

These are the professional positions of graduates:

<i>Employed</i> <sup>17</sup>	<i>Employed in a closely related professional field</i>	<i>Complementary learning programs NTIC/Languages</i>	<i>No Complementary learning programs needed</i>
63%	37%	10% / 13,7%	31%

<i>Professional positions</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Profiles descriptions</i>
Primary and Secondary	48,5%	Teaching at all levels

<sup>14</sup> All these data will be available in Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación, *Libro Blanco de Filología* (2006) [resource on line], <[http://www.aneca.es/modal\\_eval/conver\\_docs\\_titulos.html](http://www.aneca.es/modal_eval/conver_docs_titulos.html)>

<sup>15</sup> A Coruña, Alcalá, Alicante, Autónoma de Barcelona, Autónoma de Madrid, Barcelona, Cádiz, Complutense de Madrid, Deusto, Extremadura, Granada, Huelva, Jaume I, La Laguna, La Rioja, Las Palmas, León, Lleida, Málaga, Navarra, Oberta de Catalunya, Oviedo, País Vasco, Rovira i Virgili, Salamanca, Santiago, Sevilla, UNED, Valencia, Vigo, Zaragoza.

<sup>16</sup> German, Arab, Catalan, Classic, Slave, French, Galician, Hebrew, Hispanic, English, Italian, Portuguese, Roman, Basque, Literary theory, Linguistics.

<sup>17</sup> More than 70% in Basque, Catalan, Hebrew, Italian, Linguistics; around 70% in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature, more than 60% in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese. 51% are satisfied of their employment, and 49% are unsatisfied because they are not working in their field of expertise.

<i>Professional positions</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Profiles descriptions</i>
School Teachers		
Higher Education Teachers	3,5%	Teaching and researching
Linguistic and Literary Researchers	4,6%	Researching on languages, literatures, cultures, codes and supporting materials
Civil Service	5,2%	Public administration, especially where a good command of languages is needed (e.g., the EU and diplomatic corps)
Cultural Industries	3,9%	Publishing industries (all levels): style editing and proofreading, linguistic consultants for print and electronic media, web page design, advertisement consultants, management and customer service in bookstores.
Linguistic Consulting	1,8%	For governmental organisations, in the legal, commercial, administrative, technical and professional fields, legal expert appraisals, linguistic pathologies evaluation, specific languages terminology, artificial language creation methodology.
Translators	4,5%	Instrumental and/or automatic translation, in every field, and in particular in human sciences.
Mass Media	2,8%	Media management and consulting: style editing and proofreading, linguistic consultants for electronic media, language technologies, cultural, literary, and linguistic consultants.
Archives and Libraries	1,3%	Management and consulting
Cultural Consulting	23,2 %	Cultural management in different administrations and private, foundations, organization of cultural events, management of cultural centers. Tourist management in travel agencies, hotels, creation of cultural and informative materials, travel organisation. Selection, organisation, and management of Human Resources and worker training. Linguistic and intercultural mediation: linguistic integration programs, linguistic disabilities mediation, emigration mediation.

As we can see, most of the graduates are working in Primary and Secondary Schools, but the most frequent occupation in the labour market is the Cultural Consulting domain (23,2%), which incorporates many different profiles: all kinds of cultural management, tourist management, human resources management, intercultural mediation and integration programs. We should emphasize the presence of our graduates in the Cultural Industry and Mass Media, where electronic media and virtual environments are dominant nowadays, because of their linguistic expertise.

On the other hand, following the Tuning Project suggestions, generic competences expectations were explored by surveys sent to employers. This is the list of generic competences employers consider the most important, in descending order:

<i>Competences in order of importance</i>	<i>Points</i>
Oral and writing communication in mother tongue	3,71
Learning skills	3,68
Capacity to apply knowledge to practice	3,65

<i>Competences in order of importance</i>	<i>Points</i>
Care for quality	3,63
Analysis and synthesis capacity	3,59
Team work	3,52
Capacity of adaptation to new situations	3,52
Ethic undertaking	3,51
Information management skills	3,51
Problem solving	3,50
Professional basic knowledge	3,47
Capacity to generate new ideas	3,47
Time planning and management	3,47
Critical and auto-critical capacity	3,39
Basic general knowledge of field of study	3,38
Capacity to work in an interdisciplinary team	3,33
IT basic user skills	3,31
Capacity to communicate with non-experts	3,30
Understanding of diversity and multiculturality	3,29
Motivation for success	3,29
Ability to work autonomously	3,26
Decision making	3,24
Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	3,23
Personal skills	3,17
Knowledge of second language	3,17
Project design and management	2,96
Research skills	2,82
Knowledge of other countries' cultures and customs	2,80
Ability to work in an international context	2,77
Leadership	2,74

We should emphasize some interesting conclusions that can be drawn from the list. The most relevant competence, for employers as much as for graduates, is first of all the mastering of mother tongue, that is the linguistic expertise; learning and applying skills follow in the second and third position.

Unfortunately, data are very different on surveys carried out with 766 scholars, on disciplinary knowledge, professional and academic competences. We are here considering only three of the eighteen academic domains or degrees surveyed (English, French and Spanish). The most valued competences are indicated with a plus sign and the less valued competences with a minus:

		<i>English Studies</i>	<i>French Studies</i>	<i>Spanish Studies</i>
Professional Competences	+	Literary texts analysis from a comparative perspective	Linguistic analysis from a historical and comparative perspective	Linguistic analysis
	-	Finding and using information from IT	Finding and using information from IT	Finding and using information from IT
Disciplinary Knowledge	+	Methods for linguistic and literary analysis	Theoretical and methodological issues Edition, linguistics	Critical theories and text edition
	-	Specific electronic tools and software	Instrumental mastery of mother tongue	Instrumental mastery of mother tongue
Academic Competences	+	Capacity to establish relations among different areas/ disciplines	Capacity to establish relations among different areas/ disciplines	Capacity to establish relations among different areas/ disciplines
	-	Understanding and transmission of scientific information	Understanding and transmission of scientific information	Identifying problems and research topics
Other Competences	+	Creativity	Creativity	Communication skills
	-	Analysis and synthesis of complex information	Critical thinking	Critical thinking

If we compare the generic competences required by employers and the specific ones required by scholars, we may conclude that scholars are absolutely off-target: the most important competences highlighted by employers are not taken into consideration by scholars. On the one hand, scholars work in a non-professional system, and, on the other hand, experienced professionals are not informed by a critical or intellectual understanding of teaching and learning theory. However, something should be managed to bridge the gap.

### **Different values, different skills: Specific competences**

As we have seen, European Commission guidelines command high transferability of education and competences geared to attractiveness for labour market. Historically, the capabilities expected might have been derived largely from religious, humanistic or moral perspectives, but nowadays technology demands and knowledge-based economies have a heavy ideological-bearing too. This encourages us to explore common grounds between the arts, science and a professional discipline or training, between what we know and what we do in professional contexts.

Arts cannot be an invocation of mystery, a set of complexities of intuition, judgement and decision-making. While all fields involve a tool-kit or repertoire of some kind, the balance between

knowledge and know-how is heavily tipped towards the latter in professional areas, but not in the Arts. Could we describe literatures in terms of functions and procedures?

Thinking in Blended Learning terms, the point is how b-learning could focus “on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the “right” learning technologies to match the “right” personal learning style to transfer the “right” skills to the “right” person at the “right” time.”<sup>18</sup>

If we take into account the specific professional competences required from new learners of literatures by employers and teachers, the question arises as to which specific cognitive procedures should be activated in order to meet those professional requirements, particularly by ODL systems. We would like to justify the view that complex cognitive and metacognitive capacities that used to remain passive in the printed paradigm could become active in a virtual environment. In our team, LEETHi, we are working to find out which competences should be developed and how they could be promoted in the virtual environments of the contemporary digital paradigm.

Edgar Morin’s definition of *complex thought* (not complicated, nor complete) and *organised complexity*<sup>19</sup> is our starting point here: “A thought which isolates and separates needs to be substituted by a thought which differentiates and connects. A disjunctive and reductive thought needs to be substituted by a thought of the complex, in the sense of the term *complexus*: that which is woven together.”<sup>20</sup>

Since the very beginning, we liked this definition of complexity because it does not deal with a linear and irreversible progression, but with looping feedback, difficulty and poly-dimensionality. The generating capacity of complexity invites to create new relations: it is that endless self-regeneration so demanded by employers. We are as interested in Morin’s priority in the necessity of fostering self-awareness, as we are in the principle of the constant reintroduction of the expert subject in any knowledge, because knowledge is not a ready-made tool to be used: its nature must be examined continually.

We can subscribe to the principles on which Edgar Morin bases his concept of complex thought:

- 1- the systemic and organising principle according to which totality is more than the addition of its parts
- 2- the hologram principle according to which not only the part is found in totality, but also totality is inscribed in each part
- 3- the principle of the feedback loop which breaks the linear principle of causality, as far as the cause acts on the effect and the effect on the cause

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<sup>18</sup> Singh, H. and Ch. Reed 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Morin 1999: 43-77.

<sup>20</sup> Edgar Morin 2000: 117.

- 4- the principle of the recursive loop in which the products and the effects are themselves producers and agents of that which produces them
- 5- the principle of autonomy-dependence with respect to the environment
- 6- the dialogic principle which connects principles or notions that should exclude one another, but cannot be dissociated from the same reality
- 7- the principle of reinsertion of the knowing subject in any kind of knowledge

These principles should inform the thoughts of computer programmers and ODL educational material designers. We will give way to that complexity so as to get out of the video game aesthetic. Perhaps we will have to cast aside the easy premise prevalent up to now: if it works as a play-station machine, it is simple, it is good. Our electronic tools will have to be complex, as our hyperlinks are, for they point to a text or thought opened to communication, surpassing discontinuities.

In search of a recursive and self-aware thought development in a b-learning model, we should try to design a carefully targeted software package fitting to serve a coherent syllabus. More precise descriptions of objectives, competences, strategies and tasks, are important prerequisites, as much as a hierarchical listing of all of them. We present bellow the table we are using (and we are working on) as a guideline for planning virtual and in-class activities. We define competences as learning outcomes incorporating knowledge of the discipline, career-relevant knowledge and intellectual capabilities skills including critical thinking, creative thinking, the ability to pursue lifelong learning, problem-solving ability and adaptability. We define procedures as a group of ordered actions oriented towards the achievement of a certain goal:

Procedures	Competences	Metacognitive skills
<p><b>Receptive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- perception</li> <li>- attention</li> <li>-observation</li> <li>- representation</li> <li>- information identification</li> </ul> <p><b>Productive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- imitation</li> <li>- information search</li> <li>- information treatment</li> <li>- explanation</li> <li>- synthesis</li> <li>-reproduction</li> <li>- transposition</li> <li>- classification and hierarchization</li> </ul> <p><b>Reflexive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data storing and study</li> <li>- hypothesis elaboration</li> <li>- foresight and inference</li> <li>- contrast</li> <li>- conceptualization</li> <li>- memorization</li> <li>- analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary Level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comparing</li> <li>- distinguishing</li> <li>- establishing relations</li> </ul> <p><b>Medium Level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- classifying</li> <li>- series making</li> <li>- analogic thinking</li> <li>- immediate inference making</li> </ul> <p><b>High Level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-syllogistic reasoning</li> <li>-using criteria</li> <li>-immediate inference</li> <li>-dialectic reasoning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge of procedures</li> <li>- autonomy</li> <li>- (self) control</li> <li>- (self)evaluation</li> </ul>

Procedures	Competences	Metacognitive skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interpretation</li> <li><b>Assessment:</b></li> <li>- evaluation</li> <li>- comparison</li> <li>- critical assessment</li> <li>- verification</li> <li><b>Affective:</b></li> <li>- motivation</li> <li>- self-concept</li> <li>- learning appraisal</li> <li>- interactions</li> <li>- social values</li> </ul>		

Concerning competences, we propose neither a linear nor a hierarchical competence arrangement but a complex, complementary, recursive and conscious process. In fact, competences evolve in a movement that cannot be measured as a linear, let alone, numerical progression. Thereby the evaluation of this kind of progression cannot be based on a horizontal view of the different literary subjects. However the time between the beginning of the learning process and the evaluation test is so brief in the Spanish syllabus that transferable skills cannot be assessed. In fact, in the existing scheme of things, general competences are not worked on, nor corrected, and rarely there is a single subject that focuses on skills. We will only be prepared to verify the evolution in competences as long as there is some kind of transversality between different subjects, and some increasing sequences in problem solving.

Concerning procedures, we know that the majority of students (86%) use surface learning approaches, focused on note-learning knowledge associated with isolated aspects of the content for reproduction in assessment situations with a low level of understanding. Only the happy few (14%) use deep learning approaches focusing on content understanding: relating the learning and assignment tasks to other aspects of the contents, or the contents to other information systems.<sup>21</sup> The question is: how ICT-based learning could encourage this deeper learning approach, even in the initial years of an undergraduate education. If the virtual environment is only useful for giving prominence to the same surface learning approaches, then it is truly too expensive and demanding.

To encourage the use of deep learning approaches, we have had to cope with our organization sequence from basic to advanced procedures, from simple (a reduced number of easy actions) to complex (a greater number of actions or more difficult actions), from concrete to abstract, from collective to autonomus, from personal-emotional to intercultural ones.

Finally, our analysis views student writing and learning not just as issues at the level of epistemology and academic literacies, but rather as skills or socialization. This is why we have considered receptive and perceptive strategies in order to learn to see/hear/smell/taste/touch and

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<sup>21</sup> See Chris Cope and Lorraine Staehr 2005.

hence, learn how to know; reflexive and affective strategies in order to learn to be; productive and expressive strategies in order to learn to do; finally, evaluative strategies in order to learn to become and hence, learn how to live<sup>22</sup>.

Concerning tasks, the limited space allowed by the present paper does not allow us to include a repertoire of possible activities: we refer the reader to our site, *Guías de lectura*.<sup>23</sup> We would like just to remark that any activity, if it really wants to develop a complex thought from superior skills, will have to be suggested as a problem-solving task or research project, able to pluralize and question possible solutions.

It is also worth noting that most of the tasks are carried out in writing. Written productions are not simple tasks, but require and facilitate higher order learning, higher cognitive operations, reflection and critical discussion. Whichever way participation in on-line courses is assessed, in the majority of cases this is carried out through written text. A range of on-line communication and writing skills should also be valued and rewarded in their own right, not simply as a means, particularly since contemporary communication tools guarantee that students' opinions or viewpoints will be fairly assessed despite their possible divergence from the views of their examiners.

Finally, concerning metacognitive skills and considering our teaching experience; we are particularly interested in encouraging this type of competences, because we think that they help to develop the adaptation capability, the productive recursivity, scheduling and self-control. We consider these competences suitable for the cultivation of complex thought at the university level and for safeguarding the capacity of critical response required by employers.

## **Conclusion**

If all this data seems familiar, it is because the challenges faced by Higher Education are not a national phenomenon. A public and international cyber-sphere has enabled new forms of imagined communities. So, European Education Space could also mean a networked learning in Higher Education.

From now on, our definition of blended learning will be complex: the integrated combination of traditional learning with on-line approaches, the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment, and the combination of a number of didactic approaches, irrespective of learning technology.<sup>24</sup> To be legitimated, web-based approaches should activate

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<sup>22</sup> It is the point of view of Jacques Delors, *La educación encierra un tesoro*, Madrid: Santillana/Ediciones UNESCO, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> <<http://www.ucm.es/info/guias>>

<sup>24</sup> Oliver, M. and Trigwell, K. (2005).

higher order cognitive skills that develop complex, critical, creative thought, self-corrective judgement and hypothesis oriented for problem solving. Therefore, what for Morin was the multidimension of complex thoughts is already a hyper-dimension for all of us.

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