6th International Conference on Intercultural Education "Education and Health: From a transcultural perspective"

Cultural identity and using music in the intercultural educational process

María del Mar Bernabé Villodre[a]*

[a] Universidad Católica San Antonio, Avenida Los Jerónimos, Guadalupe 30107, Spain

Abstract

Working with music in early childhood education stimulates a child's brain, motor skills and communicative abilities, in addition to their socio-affective relationships. Through songs, a child can start learning about and practicing his or her culture of origin. At this point, the teacher should be aware of pluriculturalism in the classroom and promote awareness of cultural identity as an approach to developing interculturalism. Nursery rhymes, because of their compositional characteristics, are the perfect tool to develop intercultural values and ensure that children not only understand their own culture but also recognise their cultural characteristics in other cultures. A series of practice-based proposals for the development of cultural identity in early childhood education has been included in this article using nursery rhymes as a first step in the development of interculturalism during this initial and decisive stage in students' cultural maturation.

1. Introduction

Spanish society has always been well acquainted with pluriculturalism. Looking back into the distant past, favourable weather and strategic terrain encouraged different cultures to settle in Spain. These migrations would continue and increase several centuries later following a political liberalization that would pave the way for Spanish democracy. This democratic process and the organisation of the country into autonomous communities is

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-963864614.
  E-mail address: maria.mar.bernbae@uv.es

precisely what led educational legislation to consider the cultural reality of these various autonomous communities. Accordingly, this encouraged the understanding and dissemination of regional culture, it also prevented a standardisation that would have meant a loss in cultural identity for all Spanish regions.

Against this background, the educational process became (and continues to be) a genuine challenge for teachers (Linaza, 2006) because they must increasingly base their methodology on communication, cooperation and student participation (Rincón and Vallespir, 2008) in order to meet expectations from all cultures in the classroom. Therefore, to respond to these expectations, educational legislation has echoed the objectives of intercultural education, which would guarantee respect for cultural otherness and involve shared cultural (re)construction for all students. This implies that cultural identity is not lost but rather reconstructed as a shared experience. In other words, the educational space lets students understand their culture of origin as well as that of the *other* while becoming a point of shared cultural reconstruction: your culture and my culture become a new culture belonging to us both.

Regarding this intercultural intention, the teacher contemplates how he or she should educate a culturally diverse group of students; what values to convey to make them socially and culturally responsible citizens, how to meet their educational needs and ensure that the educational process develops along egalitarian lines, etc. In order to provide an answer to this situation, two main approaches have been developed: multicultural education and intercultural education, mainly directed at preventing racial and cultural conflicts, but with very different methods, as these approaches are used in Europe. Limited understanding of all possible implications has resulted in several activities with mixed objectives and addled values.

Multicultural education does not seek to ensure social harmony, but rather a peaceful coexistence for all cultures. This means that multicultural education doesn't try to promote cultural exchange, which can result in racial segregation and rejection of social harmony, while leading to an adoption of paternalistic attitudes towards minority cultures. Conversely, intercultural education is not closed or exclusive given that it promotes cultural communication and encounters and, therefore, a change and fusion of cultures. It advocates defence for diversity, cultural respect, dialogue between different cultures living in the same country and an understanding of the *other* to ensure dialogue as an essential tool for social harmony.

From the perspective of this article, it is believed that cultural identity should be developed from interculturalism, with the understanding that the goal is constructing a new cultural identity shared by the different cultures in Spain. In summary, multiculturalism is understood in this article as many cultures together in a spatial but not a social environment, so as to not involve socio-cultural contact. When socio-cultural contact occurs with interculturalism, it implies an establishment of cultural relationships, and ultimately cultural integration.

2. The process of economic globalisation, the loss of cultural identity and educational responses to pluriculturalism

For the purposes of this article, a limited approach to the term *globalisation* shall be presented in the next section as a basic premise for how education addresses cultural identity and, specifically, how globalisation influences didactic proposals in the music classroom.

Globalisation is characterised by establishing an interdependence among countries that causes social and cultural standardisation, as well as undervaluing cultures that have not been included in this process. In other words, whoever rules economically will control the cultural development of the rest and cultural imitation is seen as a form of appreciation. As a result, the globalisation phenomenon could be considered a homogenising process involving dissolution of one's own cultural identity in favour of what is considered universal. This process will guarantee communication and interaction with the rest of the world, but this means losing cultural identities that are not in tune with the economically-powerful cultural model.

Globalisation is characterised by establishing interdependence among countries, which causes social and cultural standardisations as a well as undervaluing cultures that have not been included in this process. In other words, for minorities cultural imitation is seen as a form of appreciation. The globalising phenomenon is, therefore, homogenising because it involves invalidating one's own culture in favour of the culture that is considered *universal*. Globalisation will ensure communication and interaction but to the detriment of cultures that

do not fit the model. Globalisation can, conversely, also be positively interpreted if the economic relationships it develops are viewed as a point of cultural exchange, and rewarding for everyone involved. Nevertheless, this idea of diverse cultural identities coming into contact with each other, allegedly as equals, is lost to considerations of power differences between First World (wealthy) and Third World (poor). Although obviously these concepts do not address the fact that these countries may have cultural heritage, including values and possessions, that attest to their great civilizations (Riviére, 2009). Therefore, globalisation involves a diversification of customs that can allow people to understand each other and live in a society (García, 2009).

But what are teachers to do when faced with this globalised situation? How should they address the fact that students must acquire intercultural communication skills? What role does the educational system play in cultural diffusion? First of all, the monocultural role of mandatory educational institutions should be addressed because an assimilation-based attitude often develops. First and foremost, the school has a duty to socialise students in matters of shared values (Barquín, 2009). This should result in preventing a separation in levels that underlines differences and obstructs integration (Cabello and Rayón, 1998). Essentially, the school should be viewed as a transformative and socialising entity, as a space for reflection, socialisation and shared cultural reconstruction; in other words, as a place to develop interculturalism.

Secondly, educational discourse as expressed in current legislation becomes empty discourse because of homogenisation (Aguilar, 2001). This is owing to a lack of specific training that would let the teacher not simply acknowledge a diversity of cultural identities, but also restructure a shared and different culture from other areas of the world. Also, given this situation, teachers have to train themselves along an intercultural line considered suitable by the relevant entities in order to guarantee in-class development for different cultural identities present in the classroom.

To address this matter, content regarding what are known as *exterior* cultures has been increasingly included in legislation. Regardless, European political actions have carried too much weight. The globalisation effect is so strong that educational efforts become methods to prevent racism, but they do not promote the dialogue and exchange that lead to shared construction (interculturalism). Being able to educate from this intercultural perspective would mean reaching an ideal state of social harmony for a democratic society (Ridao, 2007).

Against this background, educational legislation started out addressing multicultural education proposals and ended up considering intercultural actions, characterised by interaction, exchange as a promotion of recognition and the acceptance of otherness, as being of greater importance. Given this situation, the educational process must insist on training to develop social competence and citizenship skills (García, 2009) in order to ensure dialogue, which is essential for cultural exchange.

3. Intercultural music guidelines for early childhood education

There are many activities in the subject of Music designed to address cultural diversity, with the intention of protecting different cultural identities in the classroom. This type of activity is mainly undertaken in primary and secondary schools as key education points in developing skills that will prepare students to become model citizens. But what happens in early childhood education? Given that this is the stage when motor and linguistic skills are acquired, it seems that issues about addressing cultural diversity at the same level as other mandatory educational stages are being avoided. In this article, new possibilities working with songs are proposed to address intercultural objectives that not only help in understanding one's own cultural identity, but also assist in building a shared culture for other groups in the classroom.

These possibilities are based on popular nursery rhymes because the content simultaneously facilitates motor activities, specific linguistic skills and cultural comprehension. This type of song shares certain musical characteristics throughout Europe, as well as North, Central and South America; by using a common element, difference can be developed as a factor of uniqueness and respect for the *other*. Students in early childhood education enjoy these songs because they are short and include simple language with easy to understand lyrics. Also, the rhythm of these songs cannot be pinpointed to a single spot on the globe because many nursery rhymes are shared in different parts of the world, as shall be demonstrated shortly. This encourages using music as a tool for cultural learning and intercultural development. Music education should not be focused on a specific type of

music expressed as a prototype for everything (Alsina, 2006) but rather it should demonstrate a wide variety of genres and styles. In other words, music education must show the cultural wealth brought about by music as well as diversity, but at the same time it must respond to the need to create shared cultural identities that facilitate harmonious social development. This is because using music ensures the possibility of dialogue, which is essential in achieving an intercultural situation.

The nursery rhyme *Tengo una muñeca* (I have a doll) is widely used in early childhood education in Spain, it is also commonly sung in El Salvador in Central America, although with some variation in the lyrics but not the music. Using this song, various guidelines shall be proposed for an intercultural project that encourages reflecting on one's own culture in this early educational stage while encouraging dialogue with other cultures present.

There are motions associated with the song lyrics that can be performed, although not in the version sung in Spain, rather in the El Salvadorian version which has some slight differences in the lyrics. The children and their family members can be asked to record different versions of this song using mobile phones or other recording devices, given that it is not unusual to see young children using this type of equipment. The different versions of the song can be played in class to demonstrate that the only thing that changes are the lyrics and, therefore, despite the fact that we are different we have a lot in common, which we can take as a starting point in reconstructing a shared identity. This exercise lets children reflect on their own culture while encouraging dialogue with others in order to share a cultural identity.

Musical accompaniment using unpitched percussion instruments offers several possibilities at this stage. On the one hand, it encourages body control and fine motor skill development; on the other hand it contributes to valuing classmates, appreciating their contributions and respect for taking turns. Accompaniment can be free-style with the loudness this implies, or it can be controlled by the teacher using imitation activities. When accompaniment is set up in a follow-the-leader style, so that a student makes sounds or movements that the others have to imitate during the song, this immediately encourages respect for others. If groups are organised and must choose their accompaniment, a sense of belonging, a collaborative spirit and respect are also developed.

This song offers the possibility for a very interesting creative project because a story can be written using a roll of paper and the message in the song. The interesting part will be to divide the students into groups to sing the song again after reaching a consensus. In this manner, not only are music skills being developed, but so too socio-affective and artistic skills. This is because, first of all, the various activities in this stage should be characterised by the highest degree of an interdisciplinary approach as possible. Reinterpreting a traditional piece of music lets students understand different points of view about the same song that they might consider their own. This leads to the conclusion that nothing is solely *mine* but rather *ours* from the moment we share and start to talk about it.

Another song that is often used everywhere in the world at this educational stage is *Campanitas del lugar* (Little Town Bells, sung to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star), although in countries like El Salvador it is called *Estrellita* (Little Star). Among other changes, in the version sung in Spain the word "bell" is substituted for "star." Given that there are details that vary from one version to another, in order to guarantee that students understand other cultural realities and how the essence of the song (the music) doesn't change, it's best to not use the version sung in Spain.

What is interesting about this song is that referring to stars instead of bells lets students understand the universe and its basic principles as elements shared by everyone. From this perspective understanding the *other* becomes easier because this *other* shares the same stars with *us*. This is the idea of shared aspects contrasted against difference as promoted by intercultural education, because only by understanding what we share can difference be seen as an enriching element, worthy of respect and that should be included in one's own grounding.

A very interesting activity that would facilitate the idea of cultural reconstruction-inclusion would be to combine both versions of the song. In other words, to have the students create a melody using the two versions. The end result would not only help students to understand how important a respectful intercultural situation is for all cultures involved, but would also have them reach this conclusion using an artistic and creative process (i.e. music), with the enormous advantages this brings to their overall development.

To conclude working with this song, and so that it may be considered complete, students should include an accompanying rhyme scheme. The difficulty lies in choosing the best rhyme scheme from a selection provided by the teacher that is not too in keeping with local tradition. This aspect should not be mentioned to students because

they will insist that they don't see the differences and that they simply are attracted to the rhyme scheme they are most familiar with, which they will apply without any other limitations.

It is evident that this type of activity contributes to developing creativity in students and not simply to educating them along intercultural lines.

4. Conclusion

Practicing music opens the mind to different aesthetic phenomena (Leiva, 2005) because using music transmits universal feelings, etc; therefore, it would seem logical to consider music an instrument to bring together one's own identity and the *other* identity. Furthermore, the music education process presents certain methodological, conceptual and practice-based traits that make it the ideal educational tool for developing interculturalism, understood as constructing a shared cultural identity as has been demonstrated by the guidelines in the previous section.

Practicing musical activities develops group values and appreciation for the musical styles of others; these objectives are vital in ensuring a successful intercultural education at this stage. Giráldez (1997) demonstrated that practicing the music of others does not constitute a loss in one's own cultural identity. On the contrary, it opens the door to cultural reflection and lets steps be taken in creating a common construction because it allows the *other* to be heard and requires his or her input (González, 2007). Even authors who are not music specialists such as Rué (1998) have pointed out that performing music is the perfect image to illustrate team work, which is essential in achieving socio-affective integration.

An overall approach is required in order to teach interculturalism through music (Moreno, 2010). It should be kept in mind that education is not simply offering knowledge about a specific discipline (Linaza, 2006) but also involves comprehensively instructing students so that they may develop fully within their society, meaning both the host society as well as their society of origin. This is because society is not a singular concept and it should be understood that every human being belongs to different "groups" (Barquín, 2009). Navarro (2008) also considered that music, owing to its interpretive, compositional and even didactic characteristics, is a tool that facilitates understanding interculturalism and teaching respect for diversity.

Using popular nursery rhymes, students are invited to think about their own culture, especially if these nursery rhymes are to some extent shared internationally. This leads to a dialogue about the *other* in order to be able to coexist in a society in which students are members. The most important aspect is to use songs the students are familiar with so as to not neglect their cultural distinctiveness, and also to let them understand what they share.

Early childhood education teachers do not have to make sweeping changes in their music activities, as has been demonstrated in this article. They only have to make some adjustments towards making these activities more intercultural, that is to say more conducive to cultural self-reflection; this will enable students from an early age to have a conversation with the *other* who will then cease to be so different.

References

Aguilar, M. R. (2001). La interculturalidad en el marco de las políticas educativas. *Segunda Reunión Nacional de México*, November 11-14. Mexico.

Alsina, P. (2006). *El área de educación musical. Propuestas para aplicar en el aula*. Barcelona: Graó.

Barquín, A. (2009). ¿De dónde son los hijos de los inmigrantes? La construcción de la identidad y la escuela. *Educar*, *44*, 81-96.

Cabello, Mª J. & Rayón, L. (1998). En un aula de educación primaria: de la multiculturalidad con minúsculas a la cultura con mayúsculas. *Educar*, *22-23*, 313-318.

García, F. (2009). Formación inicial del profesorado y de los psicopedagogos en educación de la convivencia. *Educar*, *43*, 43-60.

Giráldez, A. (1997). Educación musical desde una perspectiva multicultural: diversas aproximaciones. *Revista Transcultural de Música*, *número inaugural*. Web, http://sibetrans.com/trans/a317/educacion-musical-desde-una-perspectiva-multicultural-diversas-aproximaciones. Date of access: May 24 2012

González, O. (2007). La agrupación instrumental de percusión en la escuela, elemento de socialización del alumnado. In Mª A. Ortiz (Coord.), *Diferencias culturales y atención a la diversidad en la escuela* (pp. 203-222). Granada: Universidad de Granada.

Leiva, J. J. (2005). Una mirada intercultural en la educación de la música. *Filomúsica. Revista mensual de publicación en internet*, *70*. Web, http://filomusica.com/filo70/intercultural.html. Date of access: May 24 2012

Linaza, J. L. (2006). Desarrollo, educación y exclusión social. *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, *11* (2), 241-252.

Moreno, Mª J. (2010). La interculturalidad en Educación Primaria. *Hekademos. Revista Educativa Digital*, *7*, 115-132.

Navarro, R. (2008). *La educación intercultural a través de la educación artística. El caso del estado de Indiana (EE.UU.).* http://documentacion.edex.es/docs/1308NAVedu.pdf. Date of access: 24 May 2012

Ridao, S. (2007). Inmigración y Educación. A propósito de su representación discursiva. In M. Lario (Coord.), *Medios de comunicación e inmigración* (pp. 215-236) Murcia: CAM-Obra Social.

Rincón, J. C. & Vallespir, J. (2008). El tratamiento de la interculturalidad en los centros de primaria de las Islas Baleares, según las programaciones generales anuales: el Plan de Acogida Lingüística y Cultural. *Revista de Educación*, *353*, 415-441.

Riviére, G. H. (2009). *La Museología. Curso de museología/textos y testimonios*. Madrid: Akal.

Rué, J. (1998). L'immigrant a l'escola. La metodologia del treball cooperatiu com a via d'integració social i acadèmica dels alumnes d'origen immigrant. *Educar*, *22-23*, 285-294.