

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH ORAL FOLK LITERATURE FOR STUDENTS IN A BILINGUAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: *In the educational context, the goal promoted by school as a complex system is that every European should know other languages in addition to his/her own (Breidbach, 2003; Gogolin, 2002). Research data shows that oral folk literature is an effective tool to raise bilingual learners' interest and curiosity for other countries and cultures, such as Romanian culture, as well as to facilitate reflection about their own values, practices and beliefs. In an attempt to respond to the needs of instruction in bilingual education, this study explores different kinds of folk literature from different cultures which can be found in the classroom. Our objective is to develop teaching materials that provide academic staff with the resources to guide and support the learning process of students and we tried to assess if the oral folk literature contributes to developing the bilingual and intercultural competence.*

Keywords: *bilingual education, intercultural competence, folk literature*

1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a key element in the construction and development of the intercultural competence. In this increasingly globalized era, intercultural communication is a process that leads to the cultural globalization (Sorrells, 2012) of a world in which persons with diverse linguistic backgrounds must become adapted to a new community. Thus, the importance of language-learning is highlighted and the bilingual competences of students in our classes are highly valued as a means of forging their own identity. Consequently, folk literature represents an essential tool for bilingual education, a necessary step towards recognizing and comprehending one's history, one's roots and the unique symbols that form a nation's identity.

At present, the increasing arrival of immigrant students in Europe, especially in Spain, has obviously transformed all the schools. A large number of immigrants came to Spain from all over the world, but especially from Romania (NIS, 2015). This is the situation all over the Spain, but it acquires

special relevance in the case of Valencia where the immigrant students are in a context where the language of teaching (Catalan), alongside Spanish is extensively used in education and also different from student's native language (L1). Therefore, in this immersion context of bilingualism they must acquire new languages (L2 and L3), faced with learning difficulties and become familiar with their corresponding cultures. The main goal for the bilingual education is to guarantee that students obtain a good knowledge of Spanish and Catalan at the end of their compulsory educational period.

This study investigates the premise that oral folk literature has a considerable potential of expanding the learning process for Romanian bilingual immigrant students and therefore, can contribute to developing bilingual and intercultural competence. It draws on the developing teaching materials that provide academic staff with the resources to guide and support the learning process of students.

Considering that folk literature plays an active and important part in promoting bilingual competence and cultural enrichment, the goals and objectives of this study could be efficiently summarized in the following lines:

- to develop a didactic sequence among students, though a detailed analysis of the motifs that appear in Romanian folk literature;
- to foster bilingual and intercultural values of Romanian students by allowing them to get to know their own culture, as well as the culture of the new space they inhabit (destination culture).

2.Methodology: The didactic sequence

2.1. Justification

As mentioned, the main objective of the present sequence consists in the development of the bilingual and intercultural competence in the classroom. Furthermore, the didactic sequence (DS) is based on the constructivist methodology, meaning that knowledge is constructed by the pupils as they create and develop it. This process favours meaningful learning as the pupils reprocess their preconceptions on folksongs and folk literature, starting with their own observations. A basic methodological factor will consist in highlighting the need to work in a group and to share the results with the rest of the class: Organised in groups, the entire classroom collects data, while all the pupils present and analyse it. The distribution of the work to be done makes all the members of the group jointly responsible. The project will be more rigorous as long as each of them uses all five senses (Ramos and Ambrós, 2008).

2.2. Sequence programming

1. Understanding oral and written discourses in the different contexts of the social and cultural activity.
2. Utilising Catalan and Castilian in order to express oneself orally and in writing, in a coherent and appropriate manner for every communication situation and for the various contexts of the social and cultural activity, in order to gain awareness of one's own feelings and ideas, and in order to control their own behaviour.
3. Appropriately utilising the oral language in the social and cultural activity according to the various functions and communicative situations, while adopting a respectful and cooperative attitude.
4. Knowing and valuing the linguistic and cultural richness of Spain as heritage of all Spanish people, and considering, in a proper and respectful manner, the different situations which arise from the languages which are in contact in bilingual communities.
5. Analysing the different social uses of Catalan and Castilian in order to avoid the linguistic stereotypes which involve judgements of value and classist, racist or sexist prejudices.
6. Appreciating the possibilities offered by Catalan, language of the Region of Valencia, as a means of communication and structuring.
7. Applying, with some autonomy, the knowledge regarding the language and the rules for using it in order to understand oral and written texts and to write and speak correctly, with adequacy, coherence and cohesion, both in Catalan and Castilian.
8. Understanding literary texts by using the knowledge regarding the conventions for each genre, the themes and motifs of the literary tradition and the stylistic devices. Appreciating one's communicative possibilities so as to improve one's personal production.
9. Gaining knowledge of relevant samples of literary heritage and valuing them as a way to symbolise the individual and collective experience in different historical and cultural contexts.
10. Knowing and distinguishing the main artistic and literary periods, their characteristic traits and their authors and the most representative works for each of them. Knowing the representative literary works and fragments of the official languages of the Region of Valencia.
11. To interpret and use reading and writing as sources of pleasure, of personal enrichment and of knowing the world, and to consolidate reading through age-appropriate texts.
12. To use, with progressive autonomy, the means of social communication and the information technologies in order to obtain, interpret and evaluate information of different types and different opinions.

Activity	Organization	Resources	Time	Objectives
PA 1 (Preparation Activity) Reading the <i>Tombatossals</i> folktale	The entire class	The text of the folktale and the characteristics of the genre	1 h.	1,2,3,6,8,9
PA 2 (Preparation Activity) Compilation of the folktales of different cultures	Groups and the entire class	Collected texts	2 h.	2,4,8,9,11
IA 3 (Implementation Activity) Popular folktales of the Romanian culture	Groups	The text of the folktales	1 h.	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,12
IA 4 (Implementation Activity) Characteristics of the Romanian folktales	Groups	Traditional and/ or digital writing resources	1 h.	2,3,9,10,12
IA 5 (Implementation Activity) The social function of folktales	Groups	Traditional and/ or digital writing resources	1 h.	2,3,4,8,10
IA 6 (Implementation Activity) Compilation of the aspects discussed regarding the Romanian folktales	Groups	Resources and materials for the preparation of the mural	1h.	1,2,3,12
IA 7 (Implementation Activity) Compilation of the aspects discussed regarding the folktales of different cultures	Groups	Resources and materials for the preparation of the mural	2 h.	1,2,3,12
IA 8 (Implementation Activity) The universality of popular literature	The entire class	Texts for reflection	1 h.	1,3,6,7,10
EA 9 (Evaluation Activity) Creative writing workshop based on folktales	Pairs	Traditional and/ or digital writing resources	2 h.	2,4,6,7,9,11,12
EA 10 (Evaluation Activity) Preparation of folktales	Individual	Traditional and/ or digital writing resources	3 h.	2,3,4,7,11,12

Table 1. Activities of the sequence

2.4 Methodological guidelines

It should first be noted that the DS presented has been scheduled for the duration of 15 hours. However, this schedule will have to be adjusted according to some variables, such as the linguistic and literary competence of the pupils or the strategies they have developed in the previous courses regarding the skills required by the proposal.

Furthermore, the DS has been scheduled while taking into account the objectives and contents referred to in the official curriculum of the Region of Valencia for 4th year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education); nevertheless, it can be adapted to other prior or subsequent courses. As can be seen, the DS is designed for a classroom in which the percentage of pupils who are part of other cultures is noticeable, which has become common in the current circumstances. Specifically, the objective of developing the multilingual and intercultural competence presented in this proposal would build on the Romanian folk literature and that is why we have thought about a centre located in the province of Castellón, a province of our community in which the percentage of Romanian students is higher. For this reason, the folktale which opens the class proposed is *Tombatossals*, which talks about the origin of the city of Castellón. Given the nature of the proposal, we therefore think of a classroom of 4th year ESO, in which the percentage of pupils from Romania is about 20%; so that we can have a Romanian pupil in each group. In an average *ratio* of 30 pupils, the number of those who come from Romania will determine the number of groups in the classroom, about six or seven.

In relation to ICT, this sequence integrates it, since most activities can be done on digital support, thus it should be checked that the pupils have developed a certain expertise in this type of resources and that the centre has the necessary facilities.

It is advisable to give some indications on the development of the proposed activities and the materials used.

PA 1 Reading the *Tombatossals* folktale: reading the folktale *Tombatossals*, which tells the origin of the city of Castellón. To this end, we recommend edition 3 i 4, *l'Estel* collection, published in 1988. After reading the above-mentioned text, a debate is started regarding the folktales that the pupils know from their place of origin. To end the session, the teacher will present the basic characteristics of a folktale:

A folktale is a popular narrative which is transmitted orally from generation to generation. Its basic characteristics are:

- The use of a simple language and of an oral and colloquial register.
- The space and time are, at times, vague and distant.
- It presents a simple and repetitive structure.
- The author is anonymous.
- Normally, the presence of magical or fantastical elements is relevant.

PA 2 Compilation of the folktales of different cultures: we asked the pupils to bring, in writing, some folktales which remind them of their place of origin or which a relative can tell them for this purpose. After organizing the class into groups, taking into account that each group will have to contain the maximum cultural diversity possible, with the presence of at least one pupil

of Romanian origin, each member of the group will tell the rest his choice and they will jointly choose the folktale they liked the most.

The pupil who has brought the folktale which is chosen will read it to the rest of the class and, after each reading, it will be analysed and compared to the rest of the folktales, in order to assess how well it adjusts to the characteristics worked on in the previous exercise.

IA 3 Popular folktales of the Romanian culture: in this session, one would work with the folktales collected from the region of Moldavia in Romania (Devis and Chireac, 2014). Seeing that in each group there would be a pupil of Romanian origin, he would be the one responsible with reading it to the rest of the group and, if applicable, explain the cultural details which may cast some doubt among his peers. Next, the group would write the argument of the folktale and a representative would read it to the rest of the class.

IA 4 Characteristics of the Romanian folktales: each group would work on the folktale to which the following aspects apply:

- Theme
- Characters
- Presence / absence of fantastic elements

Next, the pupils would share their work, to see to what extent the points mentioned are similar.

IA 5 The social function of folktales: the main social functions of folktales are presented:

- Cultural integration and validation
- Reaction against the rules imposed by culture
- Education and protection, especially for minors

Each work group would establish the function of the folktale, motivating their answer in order to later debate the presence or absence of the indicated functions.

IA 6 Compilation of the aspects discussed regarding the Romanian folktales: with the help of the teacher, the class would realise a mural summary of the Romanian folktales studied, using the following scheme:

TITLE	THEME	CHARACTERS	FANTASTIC ELEMENTS	SOCIAL FUNCTION

Table 2. Scheme of the Romanian folktales studied

In order to summarise the studied social functions, the following categorisation would be established: Integrating / reactive / educational social

function in agreement with the functions specified in IA5 (Activity referring to the implementation phase).

IA 7 Compilation of the aspects discussed regarding the folktales of different cultures: with the folktales selected in PA 2 and taking into account that each one belongs to a different culture, we would make a mural summary resembling that of the previous activity, which would categorize the following aspects:

TITLE	CULTURE/LANGUAGE	THEME	SOCIAL FUNCTION

Table 3. Aspects regarding the folktales of different culture

We would notice and discuss how, despite the apparent diversity, aspects such as the themes or the social functions are very similar because they belong to the collective imaginary. With this reflection, we would achieve the main objective of DS: developing the intercultural competence.

IA 8 The universality of folk literature: we would work in class on the basic bibliographical references which support this idea; in other words, there is a common collective imaginary to all cultures, which is a part of universal folklore (Devis, 2013) and, therefore, it becomes evident in the popular literature, whatever its origin:

And yet, we could add an *intercultural function* through oral literature, it is possible to fight against racial or ethnic discrimination, develop respect for human diversity and reflect on the contact points which unite us as people (Morote 2010: 58). The «universal or widespread» concept means that the expressions of a particular genre are highly disseminated in the sphere of a language, and sometimes in different languages, as is the case of folktales or many sayings. Its universality of meaning has allowed the same story, song or saying to be encountered in the most remote places on earth and in the most distant languages. It is true that the tales, as in almost everything, excel in this supranational and intercultural dimension (Rodríguez Almodóvar 2009: 22, 27).

Bascom reflected on the functions of folklore and noted that it serves, among other things, to react against the rules imposed by a culture, as well as to validate it; in order to continue maintaining conformity attitudes among its members; and also to educate, which is to convey some teachings, values and rules of conduct (Oriol, 2002: 32).

In fact, the psychological constant underlying this reasoning is that the human condition is in constant need of stories, whose symbols are used in order to explain its experience which, precisely because of its human character, crosses eras and borders. (Morote 2010: 18)

The oral literature is the most intimate and direct expression of men and women from villages, who offer us their feelings, thoughts, ideas, actions, their vital concerns, religious and magical beliefs, their festive rites, their games, their histories, their stories... most of them, with their lexical and semantic variants, are similar in all cultures. The traditional-type literature transcends space and time and, although social changes may take place, the different cultures and civilizations maintain traditions from earlier times (Morote 2010: 47). There is a timeless kind of universal trait, of common symbolic background, which seems to originate from the human condition. When, with the help of the teacher, he «discovers» that, for example, a folktale which he encountered in his family environment, had already been collected by Afanasiev in Russia in the middle of the previous century, his astonishment will know no bounds. He would be in a perfect position to understand on his own many other things, such as the absurdity of xenophobia, the cultural solidarity among peoples, the respect for different features, etc. (Rodríguez Almodóvar 2009: 26). We will discuss the linguistic and cultural similarities of all cultures present in class.

EA 9 Creative writing workshop based on folktales: With the folktales gathered in activity 2 and the corresponding Romanian ones, worked with in activities 3, 4, 5 and 6, the pupils will work in pairs to do a creative writing activity following the guidelines below:

- They will choose one.
- They will modify it with the intention of substantially changing it in some aspects discussed during the sequence (characters, social function ...).
- The results will be presented to the class and it will be assessed to what extent the modifications made are reflected in the final proposal.

EA 10 Preparation of folktales: in pairs, the pupils will create a folktale taking into account the characteristics studied and they will reflect them by preparing a sheet of the folktale created following the example of the proposal in activity 6.

3. Conclusions

The present research corroborates other previous studies on this subject (Devis 2013; Devis and Chireac 2014), which pinpoint the importance of folk literature in the development of the bilingual and intercultural competence. In addition, other didactic sequences made with the same objectives as those presented in this study and applied to students of Compulsory Secondary Education prove their viability and effectiveness in bringing together such diverse cultures present today in our classrooms. Therefore, we can confirm the conclusions obtained in the previous studies referring to a number of facts:

-Folk literature represents a key instrument in the acquisition of ethical and cultural skills, in particular, as well as those regarding aesthetics and linguistics, inherent in terms of literary education.

- The presence of folk literature in the classroom encourages the development of the bilingual and intercultural competence, since the symbols and myths of different cultures can be recognised by others, to the extent that they belong to the collective imaginary.

-This fact would undoubtedly favour closer ties among cultures and would furthermore allow the transfer of the results to other communities.

The present study has been a useful tool in identifying how folk literature, has the ability to develop bilingual and intercultural competence and link together different spaces and cultures.

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