

TEACHING ENGLISH AND LEARNING INTERCULTURAL VALUES

M^a Elena Gómez Parra

Universidad de Córdoba
Córdoba - España

E-mail: elena.gomez@uco.es

Antonia Paín Arias

Universidad de Extremadura
Cáceres - España

E-mail: tonipain@gmail.com

Abstract

It is interesting to analyze how the learning and teaching of English has changed along the last decade, especially with the introduction of ICT (tools and methodologies) in the classroom. The general trend is to use ICT as a new tool, and sometimes it is not easy to cope with all of them at the same time to accomplish an effective learning (and teaching) of the foreign language.

Our proposal is based on a previous study where we analyzed the adaptation of Primary and Secondary teachers to the introduction of the Intercultural Component in language teaching. Our classrooms are nowadays really intercultural as migration of students from different countries has become a rule in most European countries. Children are beginning to get used to different types of coexistence in the classroom, as pupils from different nationalities are being taught altogether. It is not difficult to have two/three different languages in the same classroom. In our country, intercultural differences are generally outstanding as these cultural differences can be found in different religion backgrounds (Catholic / Muslim), dressing (for example, women/girls wearing veil) or even food (for instance, the prohibition for Muslims to eat pork). Such intercultural differences are generally the starting point of misunderstandings among students which need a special intervention from the teacher. We firmly believe that such intercultural education can benefit from the introduction of ICT in the classroom (Elía 2007) [1].

We propose some activities which can be used by teachers to promote language learning through the Internet as well as to promote intercultural exchange of pupils. Our final conclusions will summarize the advantages of this approach and the need to implement this type of methodology in the classroom if our final goal is to succeed in a democratic and joined (but different at the same time) Europe.

Keywords

Intercultural values, learning and teaching, ICT

1. Introduction

ICT and the teacher of foreign languages have a 'common' story. Although the term ICT is relatively new in the literature, their development is not so. All teachers of English, French, German or Italian have traditionally used the (now outdated) cassette, video, tape recorders, language labs, OHP... They (which for teachers of other subjects were quite 'unknown') were usual tools for our classes and thus, the renewal of methods have been always associated to the development of these technologies. Virtual teaching by using platforms, teleconferencing, the Web 2.0 and all the new things 'to come' are the new methodologies we use in our classes today.

But teachers of foreign languages must adapt to a new challenge; the teaching and learning of intercultural values. The immigration in European countries is a common issue that we all must face. Especially, teachers of foreign languages have an important part to play in this as English, French or Italian can be used to communicate with these students who, frequently, do not speak the language of the goal country. The class of foreign languages can/should be used as a construct for the adaptation of foreign students. We often tend to forget that communication does not happen in a void of culture; we must also not underestimate the role that cultural values can play in promoting or hindering a

learning process and when this has to do with foreign languages, such value is multiplied. Students will be confronted with new environments, new ways of looking at things and new learning and teaching practices. Seeing ourselves as 'cultural beings' will help us to be equipped with the senses to notice when cultural differences play an important role in a situation of exchange of knowledge and practice. We, as teachers of foreign languages, must find a way to build better contacts and to get as much as possible out of this reciprocal experience.

The term *Interculturality* expresses a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other.

The Spanish *National Institute of Statistics* (30/06/2009) [2] published the official number of foreign people who are legally allowed to stay. They are 4,625,191 in total, which means an increase of 2.89% (129,842 people) regarding the last term, and an increase of 10.94% (456,105 people) regarding the last twelve months.

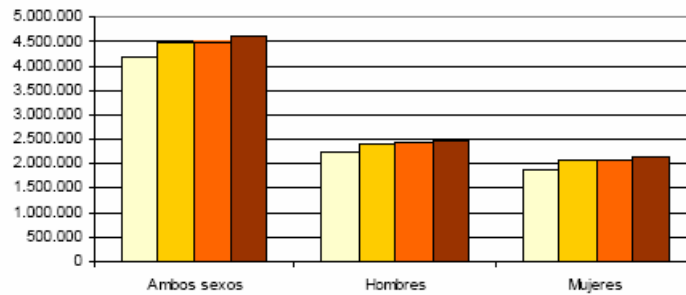


Fig. 1: Statistics from immigrant people in Spain (30th June 2009)

If we want to be more 'local', we can have a look at the numbers in our city, Córdoba (which is at the South of Spain). The official data published by the *Andalusian Institute of Statistics* [3] are as follows:

Continent of origin	1991	2001	2006
Africa	124	1,047	2,801
America (North & South)	235	1,189	5,578
Asia	97	292	597
Europe	511	774	6.403
Oceania and stateless people	17	11	18

Fig. 2: Foreign people in Córdoba according to their continents of origin

In the following graph, we can see the upward curves that show the tendency:

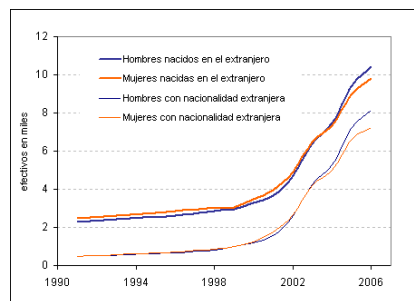


Fig. 3: People born abroad and people with foreign nationality

Data speak and the teachers of foreign languages must be ready to face the truth: if we do not educate our children to be the future citizens in this world, we are doomed to disaster.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The experiment

Our study is based on an experiment held in the *Faculty of Education* of the University of Córdoba. We will describe briefly the guidelines of such experiment, which constitutes the theoretical core of this proposal.

The main goal of this project was to analyse the new role of the teacher of English with a questionnaire given to our students (future teachers of English). They were asked to analyse the attitudes and resources found in the classroom which should lead to the intercultural formation of young pupils. The underlying idea is: "How are we, from the Spanish *Faculties of Education*, contributing to this goal in the training period of the new generation of L2 teachers? Are our students aware of the importance of their future jobs? Are they able to assess and implement the intercultural approach?"

Our instrument of analysis was a "model booklet" to help structure and support their language and literacy observations to progressively evaluate intercultural practices in the classroom.

- **The Intercultural Approach: general ideas**

Byram 1989 [4], and Kramsch 1996 [5] stress the connection between language and culture, based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Sapir and Whorf claimed that language shapes thought (an idea based on Carroll 1956 [6]). So, we could say that cultural differences exist because we need them. So, it seems logical to us that human beings need to cope with such differences in order to preserve our own identity.

The models exemplifying cultural assumptions are nowadays quite well-known and accepted by the majority of authors: Hofstede's onion model or Gibson's (2002) [7] cultural iceberg.

So, what you get is not, in any way, what you see. In fact, what you see is only a small part of what you get. Language (which could be at the top of what you see) is only a means of communication. The significance of non-verbal communication should be added and in it we can find a long list of communicating instruments: *paralanguage* (phonetic aspects such as pitch placement and stress), *kinesics* (gestures, body posture), *oculesics* (the meaning of eye contact, gazing), *haptics* (touch), *chronemics* (cultural use of time), *body coverings* (tattoos, piercing, cosmetics) and *proxemics* (use of space).

To sum up: we think that the intercultural competence should be achieved by every human being in the world, irrespective of the language s/he is using.

- **The Council of Europe and the curriculum of Foreign Languages**

The Council of Europe has quite recently published some important documents regarding foreign languages and, within this, the guidelines for learning, teaching, and assessment. *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001) [8] takes a plurilingual approach that establishes and describes the competence levels that the speaker of a language can achieve. Consequently, the cultural and sociological factors are taken into account when the term *competence* is redefined. As Byram points out (2000) [9], intercultural competence is not completely dealt with in *The Common European Framework* and, for instance, it lacks the assessment of the socio-cultural competence, which leaves the teaching/learning process incomplete: "... if it is not tested, it is not taught" (Byram 2000:8). The use of portfolios was considered as some kind of 'remedy' to this by authors such as Byram (2000) [9], Vez and González Piñeiro (2004) [10] to evaluate the intercultural competence. *The Council of Europe* published the definite version of the *ELP* (http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/levels.html). This document allows learners to plan their learning, and describe their proficiency as they progress through their language learning biography.

So, actual foreign language education can be viewed as the result of a profound change affecting all areas of the curriculum and out of which European citizenship is a new concept emerging. Kramsch (1997) [11] argues that language plays a crucial role in the emergence of a cultural change. Byram (1997:50-53) [12] establishes the curricular objectives for intercultural competence in five areas:

Dr. I.P. Eliena Gómez Faro
Research Analysis Booklet

SECTION THREE: READING

A. Opportunities and Experiences

The kinds of opportunities and experiences that are offered in school will influence the way children view reading. The quality of the books themselves will also influence the child's interest and engagement, as will their organization and display. The variety of topics will make them aware of the fact that reading is not boring and, of course, this skill is the perfect opportunity to introduce intercultural topics. The reading environment, both physical and social, will obviously also be a powerful factor in supporting children's development as readers.

Please, take the time to discuss the following questions with other students:

1. What messages about reading are implied by reading in school?
2. What kind of topics must be introduced?
3. What overt messages about reading can be given to the children in class and how?
4. What overt messages can be given about intercultural reading in class and how?
5. What overt messages can be given if reading is mono-cultural?
6. What range of reading material should be available for the children in the class?
7. What choices must children have in their book selection?
8. How should be reading done? Alone? With each other? Reading of the teacher to the children? Choral reading?
9. What physical aspects of the classroom environment can promote reading for pleasure and information? Do you consider useful to have racks/bookshelves with books and/or comfortable seating?
10. What time aspects of the planning could be improved to leave some time for reading in the English class? Would you consider that useful?
11. How can be parental involvement encouraged and supported?
12. From all your discussion and reflection about this how would you answer these questions:
 - a. "How must be reading taught in school?" (list main points only)
 - b. "How can be reading used for intercultural purposes?"

Dr. I.P. Eliena Gómez Faro
Research Analysis Booklet

SECTION FOUR - WRITING

A. Opportunities and Experiences

Writing is a means of recording learning, communicating and thinking, and plays a central part in the whole curriculum. To support children's development as writers we also need to help them become more reflective writers through discussion of their own texts, an awareness of readers' needs and an ability to reflect upon themselves as writers and the writing process. In addition to this, we have the opportunity of introducing intercultural topics to be developed in their writings.

You are asked to evaluate a writing activity with the children. Select one from the following possibilities, explain the instructions you would give to the children (implementation), and finally state the pros and cons of the activity:

- retelling a traditional tale for a class book;
- developing a play script for later performance or reading;
- writing instructions for a game, problem solving or craft activity;
- writing poetry and illustrating it for a class anthology;
- selecting a personal theme, or recalling an earlier experience, each child could, in a writing workshop, choose and direct their own work;
- videos/notes from a class discussion on cultural facts about weather, food, politics, etc. These could be rewritten to present their debate, or prepare for a debate;
- writing a newspaper account of, for example, a fair tale or a local event;
- episode writing sessions with pairs or groups composing their tale - or with teacher as scribe.

Please, write an account of your writing activity, the procedure and the predictable results.

Dr. I.P. Eliena Gómez Faro
Research Analysis Booklet

- B. Please list 5 books (children's Literature in English) that you think could be valuable in the classroom. Try to make them interculturally varied (you can search the Web).

AUTHOR	TITLE	GENRE (book fiction, picture book, poetry, novel etc.)	HOW COULD YOU USE IT? (Reading alone, in groups, teacher to children... When during the class? In what place/s would be the pupils?)	THE TOPIC: Is it intercultural? In which way? What is the message implied?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Dr. I.P. Eliena Gómez Faro
Research Analysis Booklet

B. Classroom Practices In Writing

In discussion with other students, please, comment on the following questions:

1. List a possible range of writing activities undertaken by children across at least two days, in table form as below.

Writing Activity	Topic/Purpose	Audience

2. What can be the children's attitudes to writing, what kinds of writing are **most** popular and what aspect of writing can they think is most important?
3. What is the pupils' attitude towards intercultural topics? Do they accept the difference/otherness?
4. Do students take writing as homework? Are parents aware of the intercultural activities students are carrying out? Do you know if they have a positive attitude?
5. How should be spelling, grammar, and punctuation taught/learned in this classroom?
6. How should the teachers and the children respond to, and assess, writing?

C. READING AND WRITING ANALYSIS SHEET

EVALUATING THE METHODOLOGY				
ACTIVITIES/RESOURCES	TYPE OF ACTIVITY	ALONE/GROUPS/TEACHER AND PUPILS	TOPIC	INTERCULTURAL? IN WHICH WAY?
Interactive reading & writing activities				
Cultural information found				
Combined skills (i.e. reading + speaking ...)				
Rhymes, poems reading and memorizing				
Vocabulary learning exercises				
Fill-in-the-gaps activities				
Free writing				
Guided writing				
Grammatical exercises				
Cross-curricular exercises (biology, history, arts and crafts ...)				
Ordering a story				
Games based on intercultural facts				

Fig. 4. The booklet of analysis

So, once our experiment is ready and the booklet designed, we can specify the type of intercultural exercises they can find in the classroom (or even propose to the in-service teacher to promote intercultural education through ICT in the classroom).

3. Intercultural exercises

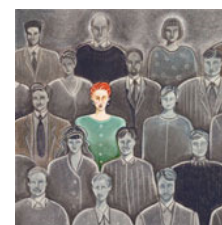
ICT and e-learning can foster intercultural competence in young pupils. We can offer a wide range of teaching and learning approaches, and also cover a variety of learning styles and reinforce materials that they can use at their own pace (to improve motivation and students' interest in the topic).

We have designed a set of exercises (for 12-14 year-old students), out of which we will only give some examples due to length restrictions.

These are the four types of situations according to the range of resources that the students and teachers have available:

3.1. You have access to a computer at home or at work, but not in the classroom

Print photos of people of different races, colour, nationalities, (if possible) involved in different daily situations. These are only examples of some images that could be used:



- Ask pupils to describe and compare the colour of their skins, homes and landscapes
- Invite pupils to imagine the country (continent) they come from, their styles of living, their houses ...
- Invite students to write a note asking for further details regarding any person they can be interested in
- Use the pictures to create a guessing game: "Who would you like to invite for dinner to your house and why?"
- Get them to invent and present additional information about the type of dinner they could have, the food, the table, the drinks...

Use the photos to ask them drawing an imaginary town and developing a soap: location, inhabitants, shops, means of transport ...

Activities designed with this in mind should disguise language skills practice and lead into a range of intercultural issues that students must be aware of (i.e., food is culturally bounded and some people do not eat some types of meat due to religious and/or cultural reasons).

3.2. You have a computer and a projector for use during class time

Project an online dictionary in class (preferably of a language which they do not command but of which you think they can have some notions, for example, German, French ...) and:

- Choose three usual words/expressions you think pupils know in the other language and ask them to look them up in the online dictionary (for example, "hello", "goodbye", and "how are you?" and their correspondent in the other language)
- If it has a pronunciation feature, use it to show how they sound
- Then ask them to repeat the words and make sure they are comfortable when pronouncing them
- Ask them to use these words in a short role-play game: a couple of pupils are in the street and they use these words to 'meet' the other

- When they finish, ask them to try to 'continue' the conversation with either linguistic or non-linguistic resources. They must ask for directions to find the bus stop because they feel rather sick and they want to go to hospital. If they use linguistic resources, these should be only in the 'other language', not in their first language (Spanish in our case)
- Invite learners to explain (now in their first language) how they felt trying to make them understood without the appropriate linguistic resources

The goal of this exercise is to make students aware of the importance of verbal and non-verbal resources for communication. This is a very good exercise for students to understand the concept of 'otherness' and the type of situations that foreign pupils can be in when they arrive to a new country, whose language they do not command.

3.3. Each student has a computer with an Internet connection

Use the Internet to support the setting up of an imaginary town. The requisites are: the city must have different types of inhabitants (different races, nationalities, shops with signs in different languages):

- Invite pupils to research on the Internet to decide on the location and description of their town (streets, avenues, alleys, parks ...)
- Invite them to recreate the town market, looking on the Internet for pictures of items and realistic prices. Make them aware of the need to include different types of food from the five continents. They will have to search the Internet and try to find out some 'typical food' from each one
- Ask learners to write a brochure of the town with a tourist guide through the highlights and the intercultural variety of people and cuisines found there
- Invite them to describe the inhabitants and to invent town gossip, controversies (e.g. the construction of a motorway through the centre of the town; a series of crimes)

The goal of this exercise is to introduce a variety in the learning/teaching of intercultural facts and make them be as imaginative as possible regarding intercultural facts. Comprising intercultural variety in a city is something not far from reality and make this aware of such diversity can be really educational.

3.4. You have an interactive whiteboard

Students give a PowerPoint presentation on an intercultural topic they have prepared before the lesson (for example, different types of dressing, different languages ...) This can help to build confidence as the pupils can speak with visual support on a topic that contributes to develop their intercultural awareness. Work on the board is used also as a stimulus for work in pairs or groups; the intercultural activities can be displayed here to maintain their awareness

Conclusions

Interculturality is an issue that all teachers (especially those of foreign languages) must face, and ICT can help to raise awareness among pupils by introducing an interesting and needed variety in the types of exercises they do, thus making them enjoyable and beneficial. This will make our students overcome intercultural barriers and keep their autonomy a powerful tool. All these factors can be a good way to build their self-esteem and make them feel motivated.

ICT empowers communication, not only among students themselves, but also among students and teachers with a variety of exercise that range from the writing of personal blogs to the participation in collaborative projects on the web.

References

- [1] Elia, (A.), "Fables and ICT: Intercultural Communication and E-Language Teaching." *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 14, 2007.
- [2] Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración – Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración. <http://extranjeros.mtin.es/es/InformacionEstadistica/Informes/> (last access, 28th Sept. 2009).



- [3] Instituto de Estadística de Andalucía (IEA).
<http://www.juntadeandalucia.es:9002/migracioninternacional/htm/14/emidb14.htm> (last access 1st Sept. 2009).
- [4] Byram, (M.) Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters LTD, 1989.
- [5] Kramersch, (C.), "The cultural component of language teaching", in Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht", 1/2. Online available at
<http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/archive/kramersch2.htm> (last access 29th Sept. 2009).
- [6] Carroll (J.B.), *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, Cambridge: Mass, The MIT Press, 1956.
- [7] Gibson (R.), *Intercultural Business Communication*, Oxford, OUP, 2002.
- [8] Council of Europe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge, CUP, 2001. (Also available at
http://www.culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documents_intro/common_framework.html).
- [9] Byram (Michael), "Assessing intercultural competence in language teaching". *Sprogforum*, 2000, 18/6: p. 8-13. (Also available at <http://inet.dpb.dpu.dk/infodok/sprogforum/Espr18/byram.html>).
- [10] Vez Jeremías (José Manuel) and González Piñeiro (Manuel), "Intercultural Competence and the European Dimension" in Madrid (Daniel) and McLaren, (Neil) (eds.), *TEFL in Primary Education*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2004, p. 342-382.
- [11] Kramersch, (C.), "The privilege of the non-native speaker", *PMLA*, 112, 359-369, 1997.
- [12] Byram (Michael), *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1997.
- [13] Byram (Michael), Gribkova (B.) & Starkey (H.), *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching: a practical introduction for teachers*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, 2002.