"Building Identity and Understanding Diversity"—Children's Literature and Traditional Literature Potential in the School Curriculum

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This paper revolves around the great potential that children's literature and traditional literature may display in social transformation, when associated with the school curriculum. Displaying a role as an important element in children's education and establishing a connection between school and out of school contexts, children's literature can give a huge contribution to the building of identity and comprehending of diversity. This will surely reflect itself in a social performance guided by principles of solidarity and equity among different socio-cultural groups. No social transformation occurs exclusively at a school level, but notwithstanding all the relative significance assigned to school in our current society. School is still the area where a more accurate guidance can be given and therefore its social responsibility has not decreased. According to this line of thought, we believe that literature also displays an extremely relevant role in the transmission of principles. There are feelings and emotions predominantly present in these texts, which when educators articulate them with a constructive praxis, they provide a crucial dimension in building identity and in the way we see each other as referred by Hetherington (1998): "in the contemporary world… flows of images, information, ideas and people cross the societies… These flows generate new hybrid cultures". School frequently struggles with finding strategies to deal with these changes, mainly within contexts where immigration has a stronger significance. We support the idea that children's and traditional literature may display an important role while dealing with these issues. Mediterranean people versus Northern peoples, East versus West, Europe versus Africa… are "consecrated" opposites, questioned by several thinkers like Edward (2003) and mainly from the middle of the 20th century onward. Are these opposites pre-concepts reproduced or destroyed in children's literature and in traditional literature? This paper aims at developing this topic/issue and putting forward some pedagogic suggestions.

Keywords: intercultural education, children's literature, traditional literature, identity, pedagogical activities, school curriculum

I

There is a general orientation in European countries to implement intercultural education in schools. The Education System Framework Law (1986) in Portugal revised for the second time in 2005, presents the following goals:

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(1) To promote national awareness opened to actual reality in a perspective of universal humanism, solidarity and international cooperation;

(2) To develop the knowledge and appraisal for several values of Portuguese identity, language, history and culture;

(3) To provide the acquisition of autonomous attitudes forming socially responsible citizens who are simultaneously active in community life;

(4) To guarantee that children with special educational needs, namely mentally and physically challenged children, have proper conditions for their progression and maximum development of their capabilities;

(5) To provide the acquisition of moral and civic education notions in a free thinking environment.

These goals appear among other national and international initiatives, some of which are European and others more broadened politically and geographically speaking.

Structures as "The high commission for immigration and intercultural dialogue" (Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural) in Portugal provide legal information to people, helping them on social and labour issues among others, and they present critical reflections and working materials that promote intercultural education in schools and other formal, non-formal or less structured educational contexts.

According to "The peoples' right to an intercultural education" (presented by the Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura), there are several political and legal instruments that governments, public and private institutions must comply with, and society in general as well, such as affirmative actions and implementation of public politics built to and with the peoples. Here, we can refer to two of them: The "Convention to fight against all types of discrimination" approved by the United Nations in the decade of the 1970s and the "Convention for promoting cultural diversity" approved by UNESCO's general assembly in 2005. These are legal and forceful instruments that oblige, especially public institutions, to implement programs that guarantee promotion, strengthening and protection of ethnic and cultural diversity.

From the "Declaration by the European Ministers of Education on intercultural education" in the new European context, originating from the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, 21st session—"Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy", taking place in Athens, Greece, November 10-12, 2003, we enhance the following principles (point 11, subparagraph b, c and d):

> b. help to build understanding of the European dimension of education in the context of globalisation, by introducing respect for human rights and diversity, foundations for managing diversity, openness to other cultures, inter-religious dialogue and "Euro-Arab dialogue";

> c. step up efforts in the area of content of learning methods and teaching aids, in order to provide the member states with examples of educational tools making it possible to take the intercultural dimension of curricula into account;

> d. develop analytical instruments and identify and disseminate examples of good practice emphasising intercultural and pluralist approaches, in school textbooks.

Besides, item 15 referring the European Ministers of Education of the 48 States Parties to the European cultural convention was "resolved to make the necessary arrangements to take intercultural education into account as an important component of our education policies; this entails appropriate measures at the levels of curricula, school governance and teacher-training".

During the 22nd session of this conference, four years later, in Istanbul, May 2007, under the topic "Building a more human and inclusive Europe: Role of education policies", an invitation to the Committee of

Ministers was made in order to instruct the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research "to emphasise in this vision the values and functions of higher education in modern society, as well as the ability of higher education and its graduates to address major issues, such as sustainability, democratic culture, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue" (item 13.2). One of the three purposes of education that is presented is "personal development".

Notwithstanding all these declarations, international legislation and other specific documents in each country, school still displays a homogenizing tendency, and therefore, we have to raise questions that go beyond classroom boundaries and that are inherent to children's experiences in multicultural societies, since "Nations tend to use schools and education as means to build unified societal structures and functions", as viewed by the authors of the Socrates Program which led to "Inter guide—A practical guide to implement intercultural education at schools" (s/d, p. 14).

When Ribeiro (2010) referred to racial issues in Brazilian society, she enhanced the importance of children's literature as an integral part of pedagogical activities and reflected on the need to incorporate in the curricula the way black people and their descendents were treated in books for children, where frequently it was striking the discrimination and racial prejudice present in them. Silencing this reflection is a form of perpetuating this situation or even promoting it. Diversity as a peoples' heritage is enriching and crucial for the building of an individual's identity. Thus, teachers should promote alterity in children's imagery through children's literature.

Books presenting negative values about minority cultures do not have to be excluded, but they should raise issues concerning the portrayed perspective and the teacher should be able to create alterity situations where the role of dominant and dominated groups is inverted in order to "put students in the others one's shoes".

The main goal is to achieve an interventive social attitude and go beyond what Banks defines as episodic, additive and transformative situations (Banks, 2003; as cited in Hudalla, 2005).

As children are continuously building their personality, literary representations may have a deep impact on building their identity and their relation with diversity.

When a culture of origin is not confronted with diversity, it creates citizens whose identity is almost inevitably based on a narrow perspective and it easily creates citizens with less flexible attitudes as far as non-standard behaviours, costumes, values and beliefs are concerned.

In contemporaneous society, we do not meet the "different" only when we sporadically travel and find transitional resolutions for some situations or even a non-problematic refusal, because it does not generate exclusion but strangeness; what is "different" is close to us above all due to migrations in several geographical directions and consequently it originates various types of confrontations.

Managing diversity in education crosses the established boundaries by cultural, ethnic or nationalist groups and it means "to appreciate diversity as a valuable force and not as a weakness that must be overcome" (*Inter Guide*, s/d, p. 3). This is not a concept or a practice that people are used to, therefore, there is a need to keep it in mind when referring to teachers' education by integrating them not as extras but as an intrinsic approach.

As literature gives shape to all values that guide our way of viewing the world, we believe that the early contact that children have with literature may be a great step to the education towards diversity and to an integration of diversity in the building up of their identity.

Children's literature frequently assimilates traditional texts (tales, legends, rhymes and nursery rhymes)

and it has a great potential to learn through diversity. By contacting with different scenarios, ideological representations and interaction between characters, it provides a way of identifying what one already knows, recognizing the different and understanding that the different might have much in common with the already known. Nonetheless, teachers need to be sensible to this aspect and transmit it to children. Thus, the importance we give to this area in teachers' education and its integration in the curriculum as a generator unit of new perspectives in all the work will be developed with children.

II

We took the nine general recommendations of *Inter Guide* (s/d, p. 56) as a starting point to reflect upon the potentiality texts for children have in planning and adapting curriculum from a perspective of homogeneity vs. diversity in schools.

Thirty-five students of a school of education in Portugal, taking a degree in basic education, and that in the first semester of this academic year worked on children's literature, have responded to a questionnaire containing these nine items. Moreover, they were asked to identify the items that were focused on the children's books they had read. However, the choice of the books was not based on these criteria, but they were chosen according to an intercultural perspective. In fact, the choice can be seen as random, for it does not correspond to the systematization made in the *Inter Guide*, nonetheless, it was a selection integrated in a broaden curricular program and it can be looked upon as a selection that shows the role that children's literature may display in building identity and understanding diversity.

The following percentages show the principles students found in the analyzed books for children:

(1) Shows the social diversity of environment—62.86%;

(2) Shows people from different environments, backgrounds and lifestyles as being able to take decisions about their own lives—80%;

(3) Includes different customs and attitudes from the perspective of cultural relativism, which is to understand them within the context where they were produced, taking care to avoid influencing them from our own perspective or judged in accordance to our own beliefs and values—82.86%;

(4) Shows role models from different traditions and perspectives whose views are presented positively and valued—65.71%;

(5) Promotes a positive image of any group and avoids presenting anyone of them as more important or better than the other ones—77.14%;

(6) Avoids stereotyping groups or people from different groups—1.43%;

(7) Gender roles are treated equally avoiding judgement according to our current set of values—37.14%;

(8) Languages of different groups are appreciated equally and presented as valuable resources for communicating—68.57%;

(9) Stories about the past should be presented as a shared memory and not as a discourse of dominant elites. Each student should feel that he/she belongs to, and could recognise himself/herself in the continuation of the historical discourse from the present moment in time—88.57%.

It is interesting to notice that every item was covered, even though we made a random selection. Actually, due to this kind of selection, the texts hardly covered item 7 about the roles of female and male (only 37.14% of students considered that it was an issue presented in children's literature) and item 4 (with 65.71%), since the texts read did not show frequent comparisons of role models from different traditions.

Nevertheless, item 1 "Shows the social diversity of environmental" (62.86% of the students identified it), which got the second lowest percentage, might not have been well understood by the students, since it requires a greater abstraction analysis. All other items refer to more concrete and obvious aspects in the analyzed texts. Such is the case of the items with the highest scores, item 3 (82.86%)—"Includes different customs and attitudes from the perspective of cultural relativism" and item 9 (88.57%)—"Stories about the past should be presented as a shared memory but not as a discourse of dominant elites".

The physical, psychological and socio-cultural characteristics of the characters, as well as the physical and socio-cultural characteristics of space and the relation with diversity are dimensions, which help us to understand how to explore children's literature from a perspective of intercultural education and these when taken into account to carry out this analysis.

As here it is not possible to analyze a book to illustrate each situation, we are going to present only some examples of books for children that show four of these principles of intercultural education by picking three with an intermediate score and the fourth being the one with the highest score. Firstly, we are going to point out item 1 which 62.86% of the students have signalled.

Item 1: Shows the Social Diversity of Environmental

In Narváez and Salmerón's (2007) book, *The Legend of the Traveller That Couldn't Stop*, the main character—Kostia is young and lives alone. He is confined to a wheel chair and depends on neighbours' charity. He watches daily life through the window of his house and always from an inside to an outside perspective. Brave and decided, he accepts the forest spirit's proposal of drinking a magical potion to be able to walk again. Kostia also accepts the confinements of his decision—"You shall not stay longer than three consecutive days in the same place" (p. 23) without realizing, in part due to his inexperience, the heavy burden he will have to carry of never being able to create roots and forever to be a traveller.

Kostia shows that he can easily adapt and integrate in strange places. His adapting capability is great, but the generosity of people who welcome him help a lot in this process. After all, Kostia continues to depend on others just like in his village. He lives in a dichotomy and he shows the reader how circumstances determine choices. Becoming an eternal traveller is a limitation as heavy as the physical limitation bounding him to his house. At a time, he arrives at a village that is in danger and once more he is welcomed by its inhabitants and decides to help them to rebuild a dam that was threatening the village. At this point, he falls in love with Sónia, a villager. So, he stays in this place longer than the magical drink allows him to and he is transformed into a tree. His surrounding space becomes limited once again like in the beginning of the story, but this time he preferred to create roots and remain fixed in the same place. The difference between his early situation is that this time, he has travelled the world and he decides to stay rooted in the same place by option and not by a matter of chance and he is outside turned into a form of the vegetal world.

Kostia has always been aware of his "difference", but he does not fell shame, anger or discomfort. There is no reference in text that shows the character is hindered by his final debility and it is, in fact, placed among other immobile forms of nature, such as trees.

What are important to enhance in this story is how circumstances determine choices and how the "difference" reveals itself within us and not in others.

Item 2: Shows People From Different Environments, Backgrounds and Lifestyles as Being Able to Take Decisions About Their Own Lives

In this item, 80% of the students have considered that this principle is well illustrated and it can be

depicted by Alain Corbel's book *Djuku's Journey* (2003). Djuku leaves her village and goes to the city looking for a different life. The skills demanded by her culture are different from the ones demanded in this new space, but she finds one similar to what she knows—cooking at a restaurant; Djuku shows adaptation capabilities without rejecting her roots. She thinks: "It is necessary that what I have lived marries to what I am living, that the restaurant becomes engaged to the village" (p. 7).

The difference is marked by the contrast between the two spaces: village and city. Djuku is viewed as an immigrant and the text portrays her arrival to another culture. As a person, she is not described as different from the other people living in the new space. It is the book's cover illustration that immediately informs us about her tone of skin. By itself, this is not a "difference", we only notice it when other characters appear in the story. The text refuses to depict characters based on a black/white dichotomy, but it enhances others, such as Djuku's feminine presence in the kitchen of a restaurant whose clientele is mainly male; she depends on her boss.

The reactions to Djuku's presence through her cookings are reactions of both repulse and compliment: Djuku supplies the restaurant's kitchen with new seasonings; she cooks and seasons the meat, vegetables and fish differently. Djuku has difficulty to adapt to the environment and that is shown by her tears and despair and this awakes the spirit of solidarity among the restaurant's clients, which becomes the centre of the main character's experiences and emotions. Symbolically, Djuku tries to incorporate in this new culture what she is left behind:

> Dry your tears Djuku. Tell us what has happened to you (says Mr Isidoro)… she begins to tell and the objects for so long inside her started to come out of her mouth… her departure from the village, the journey… her great solitude. The clients and Mr Isidoro picked up the objects while they were coming out: the guitar, the palm tree and the baobab tree, Nhô-Nhô's boiling pot, Pepito's house…

> Djuku was relieved and at peace. She saw all the things that were tied to her as a cargo's ship shared by everyone. She understood instantaneously that the village had espoused the restaurant.

In the end of the text, Djuku integrated her identity symbols in the new space: the objects of her daily life and her ethnic food. Issues concerning social and economical disequilibrium and minorities' rights are not questioned in general. In the text, it is enhanced the values of equality, dignity and solidarity showed spontaneously by several individuals, according to the concept of "transculturation".

Notwithstanding society's negative aspects revealed by the dominant group, this is the prevailing attitude naturally placing the reader facing the fact that it is possible to live with and to understand difference. Djuku's self and hetero identity performances are made consciously and assumed by her, the conflicts (with the newness, the new space, people with different customs) find resolution in the moment of celebration.

Item 6: Avoids Stereotyping Groups or People From Different Groups

In item 6, 71.14% of responses are not centred on racial, ethnic, religious, physical or cognitive differences. Thus, the teacher's role is crucial in guided reading so that the ideological message is not lost and in order to promote future critical, constructive and autonomous reading.

In *The Little Gray Riding Hood* (2005) by the Portuguese writer Matilde Rosa Araújo, the main character of the story is Little Red Riding Hood after she got old, and therefore, the name of *Little Gray Riding Hood.* The wolf is also aged. The woods have also changed. In the text, there is a reference to the wood when Ridding Hood was little, "Do you recall Little Red Riding Hood going through a green peaceful wood? A wood of green leaves sprinkled with dew drops? A wood with the fragrance of leaves dancing with the wind?" (p. 14). The

wood in this story appears colourless without joy and even trees are leafless and the remaining existing ones have dried out.

Along the narration of the story, the relation with diversity does not reveal itself without a clear appealing to the reader's memory and knowledge or an explicit reference to the traditional tale "Little Red Riding Hood" made by the narrator. Throughout the story, the melancholic narration is accentuated by the illustration's colours, standing out the tones of gray, black, brown and yellow. The careless walking through the wood at a peculiar time (during the night), the apparent unconcern and the lack of strength reflect Little Gray Riding Hood's old age. The wolf usually depicted as an aggressive and dangerous animal follows the main character, but something changes in the course of the story. Though Little Gray Riding Hood appears as a helpless character, there seems to be reconciliation between both of them and there is a reconstruction of the traditional tale. Three dichotomic aspects between the two tales "The Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Little Gray Riding Hood": childhood/old age, past/present, naivety/maturity lead to a different ending of the traditional tale. The last image in the text is the reflex of a hand in the eyes of the old woman, it is her petting the wolf's fur and the closeness between the two has transformed threat into tenderness. Perhaps years of experience has taught them both that it is necessary to find solutions for conflicts.

III

In Portugal, contemporary rewritings and adaptations of traditional tales and legends have held enormous success of late, in particular in relation to traditional literature, which includes, for instance, narratives that are related to other Portuguese-speaking countries and the Portuguese Diaspora.

Thus, bearing in mind Portugal's history and the principles of the Conference of European Ministers of Education, in Atthens, in 2003, previously mentioned, help to build understanding of the European dimension of education in the context of globalisation, by introducing respect for human rights and diversity, foundations for managing diversity, openness to other cultures, inter-religious dialogue and "Euro-Arab dialogue", this paper will focus now on a collection of *Lendas de Mouras* (Soares, 2005), *Moorish Women Legends*. On the one hand, this collection of stories from other ancient cultures constitutes a background, a sort of rhizome, the roots that unite several cultures, which have ramified in time and space, and have always been studied as a part of the Portuguese cultural and historic heritage and memory. On the other hand, however, when they are turned into a published collection of stories about "the others", they also epitomize communities of "others" that may well be projected onto the immigrant communities and to the relations of people to them in Portugal, and therefore, raise questions of intercultural education that need to be addressed, namely, Arabs and/or Muslims in Portugal and how they are perceived and represented in society.

Following on Anderson's (1983) proposal that nations are essentially imagined communities produced, for example, by fictions and stories, symbolic cultural texts, images, myths and history, Bhabha (1990, p. 4) claimed that "the other" is never outside or beyond us, because it is always enmeshed in the ways in which we attempt to narrate an ambivalent nation-space. Narratives that attempt to define a "nation" struggle continuously with new limits and boundaries, new inclusions and exclusions in a problematic way. A nation's boundaries always include mass migrations of peoples and the uprooting of communities that leave a cultural void to be filled in by other communities (Bhabha, 1990, p. 291). In fact, a nation emerges as a form of social and textual affiliation (Bhabha, 1990, p. 292). There may be distinctive forms to signify it and there must be those that disseminate these texts and discourses across cultures (Bhabha, 1990, p.

293). So we may find ourselves defining Portugal through its affiliation to Christianity against Islam, but we may also find it defined through other more complex strategies as Southern European and connected through its roots to Mediterranean culture and the north of Africa against Northern Europe (Pires & Morgado, 2009).

The role of teachers in mediating these texts is therefore crucial in striking a balance between promoting an understanding of what is a traditional narrative and a legend and how these narratives may be read from the vantage point of showing how different things are in the present and by initiating a dialogue of the past with the present that might include, for example, rewritings of traditional narratives in order to accommodate new structures of social feeling, social justice and equity.

Using traditional narratives to promote complex knowledge about other cultures, to understand how one particular point of view constructs a culture, a character and a set of events as "other" is therefore not a simple task. It is, however, crucial, to lead young people into reflection about the pretended "neutrality" of narrative and of societies and to unfair and unequal distributions of power within societies and geopolitical alliances (idem).

The Portuguese fought against the Moors (their representation of Arabs and Muslims) to become an independent nation in the 12th century. Wars of Christians against Islam are common in Southern European (Iberian) historical narratives, which have flown into myths, legends and other traditional oral narratives. These have been continuously rewritten into stories about these common ancestors whose role oscillates between praise of their splendorous palaces (like the Alhambra in Southern Spain) and the uncouth dark enemies of another, most cruel faith. This same oscillation can be captured nowadays in the powers of seduction of Islamite artistic demonstrations (music, dance, painting, architecture and decoration) for the Portuguese and the fear, shared with other Western nations, of Islam's fundamentalism. There is, however, no powerful and dominant representation of Islam as a threat to the nation in contemporary times. And recently, a certain negative reaction against Islamic fundamentalism that continues to feel divorced from the legendary cultural heritage of Moorish enchantresses by fountains who would seduce Christians in some not very fearful ways. In fact, one might claim that children's fiction has kept profoundly bound up with traditional ways of representing the historic relations of the Portuguese with their Moorish "others".

However, if these narratives are to be made sense of in contemporary living, they are to be explored as to the relations of power, class and gender that they convey and which may be critically analysed by young readers instead of passively. Societies and cultures are dynamic spaces that may show disintegration from within. People may become strangers within familiar cultural spaces, if they do not follow socio-cultural development, and they may exclude those that had formerly belonged to the group.

While it is clear that these narratives do not implicitly contribute to a real multicultural and intercultural education, unless they do so by adding some basic knowledge about other cultures, we hope to show that they may open space for a reflection on other cultures that neither annuls nor rejects the specificities of each culture, despite being retold from a Western perspective. Traditional tales, such as these present homogenising and universalising tendencies of representing the "exotic" other, but they simultaneously seek to include them in the cultural heritage of the Portuguese cultural narration of the nation.

Within intercultural education framework, it would be worthwhile that the reading about "the others", Moors and Northern-African Arabs, could draw young readers' attention to Portugal's particular geographical position in articulating West with the "rest" of the world (non-Western world).

In his second preface of his book *Orientalism*, Said (2003) established a distinction between meeting other peoples and other times to understand them and study them and at the same time to get to know them as a part of a self-affirmation campaign. And the collection of stories will be organized accordingly to each of these perspectives. In this case, the collections share the will to know other peoples and have necessary control over the available material on legends to keep the fascination alive. Soares and Malaquias' (2005) collection of stories *Moorish Women Legends* keeps alive the fascination by the enchanted Moorish girl/woman and the hiding places she seems to forever live in Portuguese territory.

To conclude, a pedagogical proposal is presented starting in a collection of *Moorish Women Legends* (Soares, 2005), and illustrating rule number 9 (*Inter-Guide*, s/d, p. 56), the most valued by the students (88.57%):

> Stories about the past should be presented as a shared memory and not as a discourse of dominant elites. Each student should feel that he/she belongs to, and could recognise him/herself in, the continuation of the historical discourse from the present moment in time.

The "Legend of Almond Trees", which geographically happened in the south of Portugal, in the Algarve, shows the passion of a Moorish King, Ibne-Almudin, as a Christian princess who lives always sad, because she is in jail and misses the snow from her Northern land. The Moorish king decides to let her go, but he is so generous that she has no courage to abandon him. The wedding is celebrated with great parties, but the princess is still very sad until the day another Christian in jail advises the king to plant almond trees whose white flowers cover the spring fields and from then on, the princess could feel herself nearer to her own land.

In the legend "The Moorish Girl from Monchique", the relation of power is inverted, and now it is the Moorish girl who is in jail in Christian lands, once again in the Algarve, just like in previous legend, but situated in a later historical period. A young fisherman called António met a beautiful girl with a white mantle, who told him that she lived in a palace under the ground. She told him that she loved him and invites him to live with her in her very rich palace. They met each other inhidding and the beautiful young girl, called Zuleima, asked him to stay with her forever in her fabulous palace, since she is enchanted there, according to her father's decision, who thought to protect her this way so that the Christians may not take her with them as a slave. The boy hesitates, because he did not want to leave his mother, who was old, sick and alone, but Zuleima says that she will make a fountain of miraculous water which will heal his mother. When the boy prepared himself to swear that he would stay with Zuleima, his friends, who had followed him, worried about what could happen to him, caught him and prevented him from speaking. Then, a big crash was heard and the Moorish girl was swollen by an abyss. At this moment, the fountain started to outpour. The boy's mother drank the water and cured herself, as well as many other people who happened to passed by, but the Moorish girl stayed in jail in her palace.

Finally, in the legend "The Moorish girl from Alcoutim", a village next to the river Guadiana, in the South of Portugal, a beautiful enchanted Moorish woman lived in a beautiful palace, and throughout the centuries, she sang a song in which she tells that her brothers were killed, her father went far away and she keeps a treasure under the ground. A young man comes nearby and says that he is going to save her. There is a parody in this version of the story, which establishes a link with the present time, because the boy tells her that she is in very good shape despite her 600 years of the enchantment and she can even call the media, so that she can become famous, which makes her very enthusiastic. But the conditions to set her free are terrible, because he has to

fight with an enormous snake and the noise, which the monster makes, is so frightening that the boy runs away and the Moorish girl continues enchanted.

IV

In a pedagogical activity with these legends, we defined two main objectives:

(1) To understand the solitude of whom is in a cultural space different from their own;

(2) To reflect on ways of helping the other.

Some guidelines to the teacher are as follows:

(1) Moment—Pre-reading: discovering the Moorish women;

Suggested questions are as follows:

(a) Who has already heard about Moorish women?

(b) Are they nice characters?

(c) Where do they live? (caves, fountains, rivers, lime-kilns, palaces under the ground, etc.).

(2) Moment—Let's draw an object, an animal, a plant or tree, which we associate with Moors;

(3) Moment—Reading legends about Moorish women (divide the class into three groups; each group reads one legend);

(4) Moment—Post-reading: one student from each group tells the others about the legend that he/she has just read;

Comparative analysis-suggested questions are as follows:

Could you find some of the elements you draw in these legends? (gold comb, coins; snake, horse; almond-trees, fig-tree, carob-tree , etc.).

What did you find in common with other stories you have already heard?

(a) About "The Legend of Almond-Trees":

What do you think of the Moorish king's attitude towards Ibne-Almudin about letting the captive princess leave?

How is the wedding party?

In the wedding parties where you have already been, were there any flowers, music, dancers and delicious food? Was it different from the one told in this story?

What is more important for the Christian princess than the precious stones and the marvellous clothes? Why?

Could the Christian princess and the Moorish king be happy? Why?

(b) About "The Moorish girl from Monchique":

Where does the Moorish girl live? Do you know why?

Do you know what a mosque is? What is the equivalent for the Christians?

Do you understand António's friends attitude?

Do you think that is fair for Zuleima what António's friends have done?

What is your proposal to solve Zuleimas' problem in a different way?

(c) About "The Moorish girl from Alcoutim":

Do you believe in enchantments?

What happened to the family of the young Moorish girl?

Where does she live?

Which was the boy's attitude?

Do you think that what happened was fair?

Which is your proposal to solve the problem of the Moorish girl in a different way?

(d) Final reflection: If you had to run away to a distant country which attitude would you have to make friends? Do you think it is easy?

(5) Moment—Let's listen to the Arabic music, from the north of Africa, and discover some equal and different aspects:

Do you like this music?

Can you identify some instruments by the kind of sound?

Which students play some of these instruments or others?

Did you know that guitar in Arab is "qithara"?

To observe pictures of musical Arabic instruments and discover their names: Nay, Naqqara (kind of drums), Bouzouk, Alaúde, harbabeh (violin percussive), Sitar, Derbak ou Derbake and Adufe (timbrel).

Additional information: One of the main Arabic percussive instruments, the derbak, is played in almost all the Arabic music, from modern music to the folk and classical ones.

The accordion, the organ and drums which are the ones you probably know better are also very common in Arabic music as well as the timbrel (nr 8—it is typical from folk popular music in Beira Baixa, for example, mainly in Monsanto—inland in Portugal).

To observe pictures of Arabic musicians and dancers: Is this player similar to the artists that you usually watch on TV? How about the dancer?

Next classroom, bring a photo of your favourite musician, to show to your colleagues, and a musical instrument, if you play any, and you can play for us.

V

These kinds of activities (the questions are obviously formulated from an European student's point of view), aim at dismantling the polarization, handling with different situations, putting children in the others' shoes and not concealing stereotypes ideas.

According to an intercultural education's perspective, it would be relevant for children to contact positively with cultural diversity, but narrative forms may as well be a barrier on its own in this type of education: short stories that only portray certain characteristics and characters' generic behaviours jeopardize stereotyping cultural realities. This is one more reason for teachers, who are engaged, as in the present Portuguese context, in the national reading plan initiative, to learn how to handle with different texts: learning how to raise issues about the "different" and how this difference can be integrated in a positive way (not taken as assimilationism, but opened to dialogue). Thus, the reading initiative should develop an interdisciplinary methodology in order to respect knowledge complexity, the outlined themes of the representation of "others" and approach reading to children's real needs, so that they can grow up in a society that will never be neutral and where power is never evenly distributed. To achieve these goals, it is necessary that the text reading deals with the inherent tensions of opposite ways of viewing the world and with the "other" cultural representation suggested by various writers (Bhabha, 1983, 1990, 1994; Hall, 1997; Grossberg, 1997; Du Gay, 1997; Dyer, 1983; Pires e Morgado, 2009).

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