

Escola Superior de Educação de Castelo Branco



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Intercultural matters

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# CULTURAL MATTERS

## and Cultural Identity

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INTERCULTURAL MATTERS

Fiction and Cultural Identity

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## Foreword

This booklet evolved from a European Teacher Training Intensive Course on “Fiction and Cultural Identity”, which took place during 2000 and 2001. The course, taught by teacher trainers from several European countries, had as its aim to explore, to compare, to analyse, through fiction, through cultural theories and theories of education an area of practice – literature, through which cultural difference, ordering and association are produced.

Developed under the banner of program Comenius financed by the European Union, and with a view to promote Intercultural Education, the course had as its further aims the following:

- (a) to acknowledge the national and cultural diversity of Europe within its common aims and political/economical union;
- (b) to promote critical attitudes towards prejudices, stereotypes, social and cultural injustice;
- (c) to develop respect for those we see as ‘the other’ and understand the meaning of ‘difference’;
- (d) to develop competence for an European citizenship, i.e. an ‘interdependent citizenship’.

We believe that a project of intercultural education should allow us to understand that the European space is made of nations and cultures. Consequently, we have to study and get acquainted

with that which not only belongs to each nation and culture, but also as to how cultures interconnect.

It has also to understand that nationalities are produced, that they can be re-produced, for example, by fictions and stories, symbolic cultural texts, images, myths and History;

- that they are imagined communities;
- that there are struggles going on over the representation of 'nations' and of 'national types' within the European space;
- that these function primarily as a mode of exclusion, since identity is based on difference;
- that these function also as definitions of territories, of languages, of political traditions, of cultural heritages, of stereotypes;
- that these representations which build realities do not divide the world permanently into closed societies.

Thus, it is important to recognise that there are cultures that are like us; and others that are not, that operate possibly as the other in relation to us. Though, from the outside, they may appear as the European (or western) same.

But how are these differences and similarities constituted? In many ways it was exactly this question that the course on "Fiction and Cultural Identity" was trying to analyse: namely, through landscapes, individual identities, national

identities, languages, objects, stereotyping, territorial and historical inclusions and exclusions.

Cultural identities in their differences and similarities are in a large way constructed by stories, oral and written narratives of who we are in opposition to others, how we organise and structure the world that surrounds us in ways that are our own, how eventually we struggle to maintain that which we consider 'ours' and resist that which is 'different from us', how we transform that which is not us in the light of our own interests.

### Commonalities

The cultural context we share in the Western world - and particularly in Europe - may seem a single universal civilisation. Research in sociology (see Kuzmics 1995; Foucault 1974; Giddens 1990; 1991; 1992) often downplays differences among 'national' western countries. However, western civilisation, and Europe, in particular, is characterised by many nations, which seek to maintain differentiations among themselves as traces of their identities and their identification.

To explain this state of affairs and what is at stake here let me quote from Marina Warner's 1994 Reith Lectures. It is a passage that addresses how literature and fiction are circulated to define, make and remake national identity, but which also stresses the commonality of stories across European and world borders. She writes (pp. 86-7):

The Grimm Brothers, living at a time of Germany's struggles against Napoleonic occupation, belonged to the literary and scholarly circles determined to maintain and foster and define their national culture in the face of the invader; they became passionate about stories told by ordinary people, which had previously been scorned as mere old wives' tales, as the nonsensical wishful thinking of the illiterate, coarse and foolish romancing. The Grimms began to collect them for their famous anthology, which first appeared in 1812. The stories were seen as authentic and archaic, flowing from the streams of the forests, falling with the needles of the pine trees: the Brothers exulted over the word-perfect repetition of some of their sources because this seemed evidence of the stories' immemorial antiquity, of an unbroken, homegrown tradition. They did notice, however, that one or two rather resembled the fairy tales in Charles Perrault's famous French collection of over a century earlier, and that yet others echoed Italian ones of even earlier date, and in some instances, they dropped these inauthentic, impure, non-German stories. It's only today, after much scholarly research into fairy tales, that it has become plain that the Brothers' sources were saturated in the French tradition, which itself goes back to the Italian, and the Arabian, and the Indian, and the Chinese, and so forth – of all branches of literature, fairy tales offer the strongest evidence of bonds in common across borders of nations, race and language. A heroine with a very small foot, on her way to a feast dressed in a cloak of kingfisher feathers produced for her by magic, loses her slipper in a Chinese fairy tale written down in the ninth century; and the first beast bridegroom who appears only by night slips into his beloved's bed in an Indian story of two thousand years ago.

The 'bonds in common across borders of nations, race and language' referred to in the extract are inevitably also the source of uncountable continental, national, regional variations in the landscapes, in the individuals' physical features and modes of dress, the narrative styles which

through time intertwine with much written, literary material from several origins. This common core of stories and of folklore is connected to particular places and to particular people and thus it changes, adapts and evolves. The past common fount from which the same stories originated has long given way to diversity under pressure of time, History, context and place. But it does speak of universality and commonality.

### Specificities

I want to call attention, now, to how that which appears universal may also be seen as specific of a particular culture. The contributions reunited in this volume concern fictions and the ways in which stories are fundamental cultural artefacts for the production of cultural identities. Texts in general and children's texts in particular are, in fact, widely influential in shaping mentalities and they may do so not only through language, but also through images themselves.

The majority of people in Europe have at least knowledge of two cultures, perhaps through exposure. However, how many have acquired that knowledge through conscious effort in order to become aware of the relationships between two cultures? It is true that we are quick to spot cultural differences and that we not always achieve a positive attitude towards them. Just bringing people together may be enough for them to be able to

establish differences among themselves, but is not enough to promote constructive relations out of the varied backgrounds. These must necessarily involve reflection on:

- a) the different ways in which different cultures perceive another;
- b) the stereotypes different cultures use when they view another;
- c) and the factors that may be responsible for the extrapolation of certain features to stand for the whole.

In this booklet we therefore explore images, languages, fictional texts in order to show how artistic and intellectual activities are central to the constitution of beliefs, assumptions, ways of seeing and particular ways of life and may therefore also be used as educational resources to teach the desired balance between universality and nationality, identity and differentiation.

European education systems need to make clear that they are a mosaic of plural physical and cultural characteristics, none of which should be undervalued or underrepresented. It is important that as educators we become aware, and make others aware, that when we look at unfamiliar cultures we may distort and stereotype their original and historical meaning. Uncomfortable as it may be, it should become clear to us that ours may be narrow cultural assumptions that need to be enlarged.

Knowledge of diversity and the development of positive and constructive cross-

cultural attitudes in children and respect for others' different identities are therefore the leading ideas for this booklet on Intercultural Matters, which puts together articles from Anne Bjorn Larsen, David Cox, Kay Livingston, Margarida Morgado, Mette Vedelsby and Rod MacAdam.

Margarida Morgado

## Clarification of concepts

Margarida Morgado

### Cultural and national identity

The first aspect that may need clarification is our emphasis on fictional material and its articulation with cultural identity at a national level, i.e. as **national identities**.

Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* affirms that nation is narration, meaning that there are forms of story telling that empower certain groups and that national identities presuppose a certain narrative intentionality. Social life is not just a series of facts but also partly a web of stories.

The stories we tell each other about our cultural identities inevitably articulate master narratives that we come to define as 'a British or Portuguese or Italian way of life'. These stories most of the times defend cultural homogeneity and a particular politics of representation that may be more or less prejudiced, but that most of the times leaves out minority groups, immigrants, recent settlers and refugees. A nation nowadays is never neat, for within every nation in Europe there are ethnic groups with their own languages, their own histories and their own cultures. Within each national territory there are groups being assimilated into domination and struggling for independence. And the way we tell stories, organise History and

act in everyday life becomes a fundamental cultural identity struggle or statement.

## Culture

This brings us to another difficult concept, that of **culture**. Throughout the booklet 'culture' is not used in the sense of acquisition of knowledge, or excelling in the arts, or the practice of intellectual and artistic activity (literature, music, painting), but mainly in the sense proposed by Raymond Williams, in *Culture and Society*, namely 'as a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group', shared by people in a certain context.

The anthropological sense of culture as a way of life of a group has also been complemented by an expression, such as **cultural identity**, which necessarily involves a sense of belonging to deep-rooted linguistic traditions and customs, and a sharing of the same material culture and territory. Cultural identity does not have a fixed meaning, for it is constantly reworked in a participating way, through processes of affiliation, disaffiliation or even alienation.

We understand 'culture' also as a system of signifying practises, such as narratives, stories, that communicate, reproduce and maintain particular ways of looking at things, experiencing life, constructing meaningful historical sequences. As such, culture is part of the quotidian actions of each person or group, of each economical, social, and political institution.

Cultural practices may not be as homogeneous as we think them under the idea of 'a national culture' or the culture of a particular ethnic group, since each individual comes under pressure of several cultural influences, thus sometimes being able to construct antagonistic meanings, be divided between opposing values, etc.

## Identity

**Identity**, as we use it, implies a conscious sense of self and a process of identification with the values, appearances and ways of seeing of a particular familial, ethnic or national group, with a particular way of narrating History and stories.

We also consider that cultural identity may be not entirely conscious, as people are born into prejudiced or preconceived views through education and experience and the acquisition of concepts and self-concepts. Identities are essentially constructed through ways of seeing and language.

People assume positions of culture, they assume cultural identities through adopting certain ways of thinking, speaking, seeing, interpreting experiences among the many that are available.

Cultural identities are therefore complex territories of meaning making and part of a cultural politics that need to be analysed in order to foster European identities and intercultural education.

## Intercultural education

Based on what we have just presented, one basic definition of intercultural education might be: Intercultural communication and interaction without denying specific identities or eyeing the others exclusively from the outside, from below or from above.

We propose that it is education that is not ethnocentric and that emphasises that knowledge of others leads to self-knowledge. Its aims must inevitably be those of deconstructing stereotypes and of making people understand that the others may be a reflection of ourselves, for they are seen in relation to how we define 'ourselves', for the positive or negative. Intercultural education builds a respect for difference and ways of perceiving, categorising, understanding and valuing self and others.

It is also an invitation to create spaces in-between cultures. An in-between space for relations among cultures to mature and grow, and to be negotiated between those who live them and those who want to know about them, not just out of curiosity for the exotic, but in order to learn to adopt a different worldview.

## The stories we tell about ourselves when we come together

Kay Livingston

The Comenius in-service courses funded by the European Commission via the National Agencies in each of the European Union countries and associated countries are built on the firm belief in the value of international co-operation. Typically the courses bring together participants and tutors from around fifteen different countries. Strangers from different countries and cultural backgrounds who speak different languages come to a course venue to work together for five days. Co-operation is vital for all participants if they are going to achieve maximum benefit from the rich learning opportunities available to them in an international environment. To work together effectively and be willing to share information, ideas and expertise there is a need to build a positive group dynamic as quickly as possible. The teachers need to learn about each other and about the different countries, regions and education systems.

The group often contains a mix of people who have travelled widely and experienced different cultural situations and others who have never been outside their own country. However, all the participants carry a 'view' inside their heads about people from other countries that has been constructed according to the life experiences they

have had. Consequently, the first time that the course participants come together is important as previously held views of others may be confirmed, amended or completely rejected.

The importance of the first gathering of course participants was recognised by the tutors during the planning stages and an activity was carefully thought out in an effort to enable the teachers to talk about themselves with strangers in as non-threatening situation as possible. Prior to the course the participants are asked to bring with them an artefact or an object which tells a stranger something about them, their region or their country. When the teachers meet for the first time the object is used as a basis for introduction and to facilitate discussion.

The participants are asked to work in twos and 'interview' each other using the object as the starting point for discussion. The activity is later repeated with another two participants. In the group of four they do not introduce themselves, instead the person from the original partnership introduces their new colleague. The activity is repeated until everyone has had the opportunity to introduce someone. This exercise allows the teachers to introduce themselves by speaking and listening to each other. It also provides an opportunity for the participants to gain confidence in the use of English as a means of communication.

The objects brought by the participants are the focus for all the discussions. The teachers explain what the object is, why they have brought

it, what it tells about them or the region or country they are from.

At first sight it may seem like a simple task but the choice of object is important as is the story that unfolds. Underlying the activity is a set of questions:

- why is the particular object selected?
- why is it thought to be important?
- why does the participant feel that the object represented him or his region or country?
- what values underpin the choice of object?
- what stories develop from the object?
- how does the object link to the identity of the participant?
- what does the listener hear?
- how does the listener interpret what he/she hears?

Some participants choose to tell stories about themselves and focus on personal identity. For others the focus is on regional identity and the impact it has on their way of life. Some teachers emphasise the nationality they come from or highlight social customs.

The variety of objects that the participants bring is fascinating and each leads to a different story being told. The choice of objects fall into different categories. Some objects are brought because the participants believe that they are representative or symbolic of their country or culture and often serve to reinforce stereotypical

views. Other objects are brought because they are important to the personal identity of the participant. Some objects are particularly chosen because the participant feels that they are able to use it to tell a story that links their national/regional identity and their personal identity.

Often items of food are brought as symbols of national or regional eating or drinking habits. For example, chocolates from Belgium, pasta from Italy, wine from France or Germany, cheese from the Netherlands. These items are often the starting point for stories about the particular region that the participants come as well as eating or drinking habits. They may also serve as a way of demonstrating the value a culture places on appearing to be hospitable or welcoming to others through sharing items of food or drink.

Books which show geographical features of a country or the main cities, mountains or monuments are also regularly selected by the course participants. These items stimulate geographical or historical explanations which lead to stories about the size of the country, its population, the importance of farming or tourism or historical influences. Specific items such as a toy Peugeot car from France, a small piece of the former Berlin Wall in Germany, models of wind machines from Netherlands led to stories based on activities that hold a particular significance in a participant's country. These stories highlight to listener what the storyteller values or what seems to be important to them to tell about their region or

country. The stories may emphasise differences between countries to do with size for example, or they may form the basis for discussion about similarities such as problems facing farmers in Europe.

Personal objects often relate to the teachers' families or their homes. For example, photographs of husbands, wives, children, homes or pets. The story they want to tell appears to focus more on a personal rather than a national identity. Listeners often quickly relate to stories about dogs, number and ages of children etc. Stories linked to personal identity often enable the teachers to identify similarities that exist between them. 'Our children are the same age - what else do we have in common?' On the surface, the dialogue is about two people with children, not about two people from different nationalities. However, if the conversation was to progress they may find that the stories would show cultural differences in the way children are brought up in different countries. Nevertheless, an important bridge between the two participants has been established.

Items relating to hobbies are brought by many of the teachers. For example, football boots, training shoes, climbing ropes, cameras, model bicycles etc. Like the objects relating to family the stories about hobbies often can move the focus away from national identity. On one occasion a football boot was used by a Finnish participant to tell a story about the way he sees himself. He explained that when the tongue of the boot is pulled

up there is only a little space left and that represents the time when he likes to be in a small space of his own to reflect and work. When the tongue is pulled forward away from the boot there is a large space which he said represented the fact that he had a broad outlook on life and was open-minded towards others. He turned the boot upside down and explained that the studs on the bottom suggested that he had a firm grip on life. This story was quite different from the one that his partner in the activity then told about the skirt she had brought which is worn by children engaged in a national dance. The variety of objects and the stories they lead to illustrate very different value systems and different ways of responding to introducing themselves to strangers. They also provide a good example of how different people construct stories according to their own personal world view.

It is particularly interesting for the participants when the course includes more than one teacher from a country and the stories they tell are quite different illustrating personal or regional views. It is necessary to emphasise that an individual's story describes a particular interpretation and that one should not generalise and form opinions of whole national or cultural groups from the story of one individual. Stated at its simplest, one Belgian participant bringing chocolates does not mean that all Belgians eat chocolates!

Some teachers are surprised by what they hear. As the examples above show sometimes the participants are quickly able to recognise similarities in the way their new acquaintance leads his or her life. The participants expect differences and the surprise is usually because many similarities emerge. Some stories help the teachers to see that nations are not made up of homogenous groups but there are regional or cultural variations. The things that surprise them are retold when they introduce the person they have just met to someone else. Assumptions may be changed when a story is retold and the teacher has to be careful not to distort the original story through his own interpretation of what he heard.

What is interesting is what the teachers choose to tell in these stories. What do they put into their stories and what do they leave out? Why do they tell strangers some things about their country but not others? Perhaps even more important is what does the listener hear? How is the listener interpreting what he has just heard and how does he construct a new story to tell others? How does what the listener has heard confirm or alter preconceived impressions of the other person's country or culture?

This activity at the start of the in-service course is designed to 'break the ice' — to help the participants to get to know one another in an informal way. However, it is also an important introduction to the aims of the course, namely:

- to acknowledge the national and cultural diversity of Europe
- to promote critical attitudes towards prejudices, stereotypes, social and cultural injustice
- to develop respect for those we see as 'the other' and understand the meaning of 'difference'.

Participants are asked to reflect on what they understand about one another when they meet people from different national groups for the first time. How do they see one another or more importantly what information do they base their judgements on and what strategies do they employ to form their views? As the group meets they use what they see and what they hear to mediate what they already know or believe and form a view of the person and the culture he comes from. This activity forms the foundation for the course work on 'Ways of Seeing (or Not Seeing) which is explained in the next chapter in this booklet. All the stories are fascinating and the participants appear to listen intently to what they are being told, but what they actually hear depends on their own values, attitudes and opinions. Finding ways to open the mind and heighten awareness of preconceived and often deeply embedded world views is essential for the development of intercultural education.

# Cultural Games

## Activities to enhance intercultural understanding

Anne Larsen

### 1 Culture game

You'll need two classrooms, 16 – 30 people, two instructors

Divide the group into two groups of the same size.

The two groups have an instructor each.

The two groups will represent two different cultures with very different rules of conduct and general behaviour.

#### **Group one:**

The instructor tells them this:

You are part of a culture in which people generally like to touch each other and stand very close together when they talk. They spend most of the day doing this and meet accidentally in small groups of 4-6 people. The men in this culture are more important than women, and the women have accepted this long ago. So when people meet, it is only husbands, sons and fathers the women discuss, like "How is your husband/son/father

/grandfather?" etc. and the person is supposed to answer in every detail. No one looks bored, and everyone in the group is expected to be asked. When the group meet, they stand close together and pat each other's cheek/arm/back and they hug a lot.

When the group has finished they find other people to talk to, and the conversation will start all over again. If they should happen to run out of family-talk, sport is another possible subject to discuss – but only men's sports!

When a visitor comes to this culture, he/she is not allowed to just go and talk to whichever group he/she wants to join. The visitor must ask permission from the oldest man in the culture, who lives by himself (symbolised e.g. by a drawn chalk-circle round him). The visitor, when/if permission is granted, will have to wait to be invited to join the conversation. If he/she walks up to the group and immediately starts talking he/she will be ignored for quite a while until he/she has understood. If a male visitor touches one of the women, he is told to leave by the oldest man.

**Group two:**

You are part of a culture where earning money and buying things is the most important thing in life. Most of the day is spent on various business operations, and the success of the day depends on how much you have earned this day. So after sunset everybody goes for a walk to talk to the others about their day. Men and women are equal and can talk to whoever they want. They do not touch each

other at all, and it is considered rude to look too closely at the others while you speak, and you will always stand a little apart in conversations. They are not interested in each other as persons, so every question about their private lives is considered rude. But if they run out of business talk they can talk about entertainment, like films/theatre/ballet/concerts/ restaurants etc. They do not, when they come to this part of the conversation, really listen to each other's answers, they only wait for a chance to talk themselves.

They do not like visitors or strangers, and if people come for a visit they will not be allowed in at once. A man and a woman from this culture will receive them and isolate them for a while (2 minutes) until they are let out without any comment. If they talk to people from this culture about anything apart from the above mentioned subjects, they will be completely ignored without any chance to be let in again.

When the two groups have been instructed they choose:

Group one: An old man.

Group two: A man and a woman.

Let the groups begin to practise their rules and to "be" their culture for about five minutes until they are sure how to act.

Then the game can start.

The first step is to let an observer from one group visit the other group while they are acting.

He/she will have just two minutes to try and make out some of the rules. The observers will need to be exchanged at exactly the same time. After the visits the game stops for a while the observers report on their observations (about two minutes).

The game is resumed, and the next step is to let the first two visitors visit the other culture. The exchange will happen at the same time, and the visitors will need to wear a special badge or something else which will distinguish them/make them different from the others.

The instructors of each group will keep an eye on the time and let the visitors leave after five minutes. The game is over when all the members of each group have visited the other group.

#### **AFTER THE GAME:**

The two groups meet and discuss their experiences. The instructors must ask the questions and each group must be allowed time to consider their answers (many persons from the group may want to comment).

The questions could be these:

1. Group 1: what do you think were the rules in group 2 (and vice versa)?

Each group confirms/explains after the guesses.

2. Group 1: how did you feel when you visited group 2 (and vice versa)?

3. Both groups: Which culture did you prefer? Why?

4. Is there anything realistic about the two cultures?

5. What did you learn about cultural differences during the game?
6. Is this an activity you could do with children?

This is just one way to play this game. You could think of many other rules for the two cultures with the same purpose in mind: To make people aware of the problem of adapting to a completely different culture full of unwritten rules.

## 2 ROLE PLAYS

The instructor can provide the participants with role cards on which they are instructed about the character they are supposed to act. There are lots of possibilities here.

But basically the instructor will need to imagine a scenario based on a particular problem which he wants to draw the attention of the participants to. An example:

A young man from a European country has fallen in love with a girl from, say, Africa. She is black and has a background completely different from his. Now he has taken her to his country to introduce her to his family.

There is a father, a mother, a sister and a brother. The father is worried and sceptical about this relationship because he thinks he can foresee a lot of problems for the young couple, the mother is pleased that her son has found a girl he is happy with and considers this the most important thing,

the brother is curious and inquisitive about the girl without being really interested, and the sister is completely indifferent. She has met other girlfriends over the years and does not think this is going to be the "final" girl.

Each member of this family, including the young couple, gets a card on which these statements are written; they now know which kind of character they are going to represent, but they do not know how the plot will unfold. The instructor tells them this, and the play can begin.

The rest of the group is the audience.

If, for some reason, the play does not take off successfully, or if it dies out in the middle of it, the instructor can take the members aside and give them new ideas as to how to get on.

After the play the audience and the actors discuss it.

### 3 FOOD

If it is possible it is always a good idea to let the group members eat a meal together which they have prepared according to the customs of their culture.

The meal could be a buffet. The group members decide which kind of food they will prepare for the buffet; it should be something which they think is characteristic of their particular culture. Often there are several members of the same culture, and they may want to prepare more than one dish.

When the food has been prepared it should be arranged nicely on the table(s) and a little flag or a note could indicate which countries the dishes represent. Before the meal starts, the group members could introduce their dishes and the possible rituals linked to the eating of them.

#### 4 CLOTHES

Most countries/cultures have clothes which are characteristic of their culture. Even though it is difficult these days to see where people come from, from the clothes they wear, most cultures have clothes, or clothes items, that are somehow original.

If possible, the group members could be asked to bring an article of clothing which they think represents their culture. In turns, the group members tell the group about the traditions connected to this particular garment.

#### LANGUAGE

Write a sentence in the common language of the group on the blackboard.

Let all the group members write the same sentence underneath each other in their own language. Let each member explain characteristic features about their own language (different letters, different reading direction etc.)

If the teacher/instructor wants to stress the point that all languages are essentially equal but we

need to find a common language in order to communicate, this activity could develop into many more like it.

## Ways of Seeing (or Not Seeing)

Margarida Morgado

### Introduction

This approach to intercultural education deals with different perceptions of the same thing in European picture books and addresses the small, almost imperceptible preferences and perceptions that may render intercultural relationships difficult. As Richard Hill (1999) writes, ‘the things that really matter in intercultural relations are out of sight’. He means the different perceptions on the same thing, the preferences, prejudices and stereotypes that result from them, different ways of thinking, valuing, and feeling. It also concerns different ways of representing the same thing and the representations (the activities and processes) that each particular culture chooses to highlight.

The starting point for reflection is that reality is constructed and that stories and literature are social practices that contribute to the shaping of individual, group and national worldviews (Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* argues exactly this, as does Marina Warner in *States of Fantasy*). The perceptions that people have are so ingrained from early on that people are hardly conscious of them. But it is not language or words alone that give shape to a certain way of being. It is meaning through images – in pictures, publicity, TV, films.

From a certain perspective, culture starts with that which we are given to see when we are children. John Berger (in *Ways of Seeing*) writes that 'we only see what we look at' and that 'to look is an act of choice'. Thus, we might as well reflect on how to unpack this visual dominance that Berger refers to and on how to educate our children's visual readings.

But first let us consider the following: Why is seeing important? One possible answer highlights that it is because our identities, at personal, social, cultural, national levels are formed through the involvement with social practices, such as reading, family, school, leisure, and so on. All of these social practices involve systems of representation, which implicitly proclaim that certain attitudes are more appropriate than others. Seeing is important, also, because prejudices often arise from the difference in the ways cultures value the same thing or reason about it.

Seeing is therefore crucial for intercultural education, because the way we learn to represent and classify in each of our cultures dictates how we categorise, represent, accept or reject other cultures.

### Picture Books

Despite the pervasive influence of the media in western societies, we should not disregard the wide market of children's books in the education and shaping of youngsters. The first books that children

are invited to use are picture books and these are widely influential in shaping their mentalities, ways of seeing and of not seeing the world that surrounds them. Through picture books children implicitly learn to classify, organise and represent the world around them.

Through belonging to a certain culture, a child learns, even prior to the acquisition of reading skills, to distinguish him/herself from children of other cultures by identifying with dominant images, available, among other media, in picture books.

As a medium, there are certain common features in picture books all over Europe. Books are communication of adults to children at the everyday level. They are not grand (master) narratives. Picture books are a kind of story telling in which adults combine words and pictures to produce particular ways of seeing that may be associated with History, personal memory, social position, psychic investment, etc. A picture book used at school or at home occurs in the context of stories about who we (as children) are and, admittedly, in the context of a depiction of the world as it should be in the author's, parents' or teachers' opinions. More often than not, the picture books that get into the classroom give an ideal version of the child citizen and provide a frame for his/her imagination that excludes many areas of children's experience. However, perceptions and judgements are patterned by one's home culture. These may coincide or not with those transmitted at school.

There are obviously some picture books that intentionally and explicitly address linguistic, religious, social, ethnic, personal or cultural differences. Much has been researched in order to propose the inclusion of books for children that address alternative (and even marginal) lifestyles in society, so as to help children not internalise stereotypes. Gender stereotypes have been much called attention to, for example.

However, I wish to concentrate on the fact that all picture books implicitly frame an invitation to a particular way of seeing that may be interpreted as national or regional. For the sake of intercultural communication, ways of seeing such as those shaped by picture books should be challenged and critically perceived. That is, we should analyse how meanings are produced and acknowledge the diversity of ways in which a given reality may be represented. Small pre-literate children have only vague notions of 'nations' and 'states', but children understand a visual code that translates a culture of their own, to which they respond and that they contrast with images and realities that are different. Clothing, food, social customs may be obviously different, but other perceptions lie so deep that people grow up unaware of their existence, even though these perceptions convey values, imply classifications and organise the world in particular shapes.

Consequently, if visual images shape mentalities, picture books that we give children to

read at school, or outside it, may also be important in altering perceptions and changing attitudes.

### Working with several national children's books traditions

When working with picture books from several national children's books traditions we understand better how that which we take for granted as our perceptions of the world cannot be regarded ethnocentrically. We are also enabled to establish relations and to reinterpret our perceptions.

As example of a practical activity which aims at deconstructing how we (as children) learn to see and to value different things across the European nations, let me focus on representations of the countryside and the town in European picture books. My overall aim is to show that picture books are teaching children to see the European space in particular ways. The focus of the activity is obviously on the shaping of cultural identity in small children through images in books that belong to various cultural heritages in Europe. It is also an activity that enhances the cultural diversity of Europe and that may be used for that purpose alone.

It is always difficult to perceive what a particular country holds as a valuable or representative picture book. We may be aware of the tendencies, which are dominant in our own country, if we keep an attentive eye on the market for picture books. Thus, there are strategically two

alternatives: asking a colleague teacher to look around and choose picture books s/he considers important for children and representative of their country; and relying on information produced by experts on children's books in each country. The results we are going to discuss depend on the articulation of both.

### Selecting pictures

Select pictures that call attention to the fact that in Europe we do not live in the same manner physically – and this we all are familiar with if we have travelled around. The building of our cities, for example, is quite different. There are historical heritages, but, more importantly, quite dissimilar value systems. 'Nature' itself triggers different associations. The colours used to represent reality differ in choice, in brightness and tone. Each book from a certain national predominant tradition offers ideal perceptions and forms of imagination of the basic object, such as the countryside, the river bank, the town, the school. Lets consider some examples for clarification.

1) I chose a page of *Tobias e o Leão* (Tobias and the Lion), a book by well known Portuguese author and illustrator Manuela Bacelar, of a little boy and an adult woman, sitting on the yellow bank of a blue and green river, in the Summer. They have their backs towards the reader and are observing a circus tent on the other side of the river. Light colours define not only bright days of the Mediterranean sunshine, but also, I notice, the

dreamlands and desire of the small child, observing, from the distance, that circus is in town. But boy and mother figure look on passively from afar at the circus, physically separated from it by the river. The main message of the picture seems to be an invitation for the child reader to sit quietly, looking from afar, physically separated by the quiet, light blue waters of the river, to the circus, delaying gratification, building up expectations. The yellow riverbanks and the far off haze of a smallish town corroborate the quietness of adult and child figure seated with their backs to the reader in the foreground

2) Next, to contrast with the former, I chose a page of an Icelandic picture book by Sjón and Halldór Baldursson, *Sagan af húfunni finu* (The Story of the Fine Hat). I immediately perceive the contrast in colours and arrangement of this landscape. Yellows, pinks and light blue, it represents a seascape with large uninhabited areas, though neatly contained. The means of transportation (planes, ships) which are seen at the far end of the picture over what seems to me to be a little village do not connect to my expectations as Portuguese; they belong to crowded towns and not to this rural countryside, with only one bus, empty roads, animals quietly grazing. I am told it represents valued conceptions in Iceland: clear sky, clean countryside, good communications system, good care of farm animals on pastureland. The village is in fact a town that could be Reikjavik.

Both pictures contrast high-density (blocks of flats, a town in the distance) and low-density dwellings (small houses by the river, farms), but somehow children in Portugal and in Iceland are being taught to see differently and to value different perceptions of the countryside and the town.

3) I take a third picture, from a British well-known author of picture books, Shirley Hughes (*When we went to the Park*) and contrast it with the other two in the choice of environment given to the child reader to value. This is a park, just in the town, the houses of which can be spotted in the background. The trees are tall and brownish, there are some footpaths, leaves lie around scattered. The child is expected to and does run free and kicking around. Nature in its random forms is emphasised as are 'playing' and activity. There is no sitting down and observing for this small child as is so striking in the Portuguese picture.

The colours and the scenery chosen to represent the landscapes of childhood are strikingly different in these three pictures. But it is my contention that they do structure the ways in which children learn to look at what surrounds them in particular ways.

It is impossible to exhaust all we see (as adults and as children), my perceptions, for example, being conditioned by the ways I learned to see. But the valuable insight from this activity (which can be done with children and with teachers) is that I learned to understand better that

particular Portuguese picture when I contrasted it with pictures of children in similar situations from cultures I have learned about and with readings from colleagues of other cultural traditions.

After choosing the pictures and either hanging them around a room or distributing them to groups of children or teachers you can use questions to direct reflections towards the implicit national judgements.

Set of questions (A) are broad and open-minded, targeted to help a child understand better the images s/he is looking at:

- (a) What are your impressions when you contrast two(three, ...) of these pictures?
- (b) What do you think of these two (three, ...) pictures?
- (c) Which picture do you prefer and why?
- (d) Are there significantly different reactions to the pictures in different groups? How do you account for them?

Set of questions (B) are a sort of analysis grid to help the viewer articulate what s/he unconsciously sees:

- (a) Is there any message concerning class, gender, ethnic or race roles?
- (b) Compare the landscapes/towns represented with those you are familiar with. How are the pictures similar/different?
- (c) What is the real life situation portrayed in each picture?

- (d) What kind of colours are used? Do you find them natural (i.e. conforming to your expectations)?
- (e) Which picture would you identify with as a child?

### What is involved in the activity

Trying to summarise the points of this activity, which was here exemplified with three different pictures, but could involve many more, for intercultural education, I would emphasise that as a challenge to our perceptions of the world,

— it develops critical awareness. We discover that we have a culture and that it is socially, historically, physically given to us throughout the years (and by means of many social practices). It is constructed through the social practices of reading/seeing.

— it helps us understand ourselves better. Looking at a picture may become a strategy to unveil our identities, to know who we are, to become self-aware, to know where our ideas, values, preconceived notions and ways of, for instance, ordering cities and nature come from.

- admitting that we acquire from very early on in our cultures preconceived and prejudiced ways of seeing reality, it is perhaps one valuable step in the recognition that other groups hold other ways of seeing, which are not necessarily of different value.

- by juxtaposing and exploring these images with children we are training them in accepting an

existing pluralism of 'heritages' within the European space. And I am certain that one of our roles as teachers in the EU must be that of teaching and disseminating the understandings of several different groups of children within Europe: their ways of organising space and inheriting cultural heritages that affect their everyday living, their customs, religions, faiths.

— it is a motivation to analyse valuations and non-evaluative juxtapositions, thus promoting a position of cultural relativity. We may accept some things and not evaluate them, saying these are different scenery, different habits; or we may consider that it is wrong of a particular culture such as the Portuguese to privilege passivity and dreaming over and above action.

— is a strategy to displace stereotypes or preconceptions. We achieve this by learning the difference between stereotypical points of view and inside points of view, i.e. seeing with other people's eyes.

— helps us recognise that to communicate across cultural boundaries we have to acknowledge the many dimensions of difference in the European space.

— contributes to an European citizenship. European citizenship is not just recognising difference. It involves accepting it and integrating it so as to be able to teach/transmit it. In other words, being able to translate a different culture in sensitive, skilful ways.

### Concluding remarks

The described activity is proposed as an exercise in cultural de-centring through pictorial narratives.

Theoretically there are some considerations to take into account. These are concerned with the whether the chosen texts are representative of a particular culture. In the arts and in literature there are plural ways of seeing/representing reality. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognise on the one hand the dominant paradigms (the ones that characterise the majority of the output) and, on the other hand, the picture books that struggle to offer alternative views of the same society, even if these have necessarily to work within the conventions and visual rules of the dominant trends of publishing.

Picture books were only offered as sample material of a particular activity and may be used with students at all levels either to complement normal curriculum materials or to introduce an intercultural topic. Images from publicity or paintings from museums might be used as well, and the perspective to adopt can also be multiple. I adopted a national perspective, but images and pictures such as these may be used at regional, local and social levels.

The kind of activity described may be particularly valuable to support minority students, since it may integrate their perceptions of the world and their culture.

It may generate interesting cooperation among schools and exhibitions of material.

Pictures by children might also constitute appropriate cross-cultural material.

### Related Pedagogical Approaches

If you are interested in pursuing and developing pedagogical approaches along these lines, using picture books and sharing visual images across nations, you may like to have a look at

- *The European Picture Books Collection*, from the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, Roehampton, UK (available at: <http://members.tripod.com/pennicotton>);
- at a list of books that are gender-fair, multicultural, international and represent a diversity of ages, classes, and personalities (available at: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/special/kay/fempic.html>);
- at a project on war and peace entitled 'In-service training programmes European Children's literature on war and peace'.
- At a picture book collection (exhibition) directed by Jean Perrot, *L'Europe, un rêve graphique?*, which puts together picture books from various European nations, chosen by critics of children's fiction.

Related decentring practices/themes that may suggest other activities

- . Europe as seen through the eyes of a particular nationality or individual;
- . European colonisers as seen by American natives (Todorov's text, *The Conquest of America*, is a reference here);
- . The west seen by the Chinese (Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a seminal theoretical approach to representations of others);
- . Juxtaposing the reading of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* with its rewritten version by French Michel Tournier, *Vendredi ou La Vie Sauvage*, gives a choice of coloniser/colonised situations.
- . Identifying negative/positive stereotypes, e.g. in History books when compared with those of neighbour cultures, since History always chooses a point of view, particular events and create meaningful sequences.

## Aliens and De-familiarisation: “Beam me up, Scotty.”

David Cox

One productive way to deal with intercultural issues concerning stereotyping and misrepresentation is to engage with texts that disrupt habitual and conventional readings. The challenges these texts raise to the individual reader can then be translated by analogy to unchallenged perspectives. Crucially, this process forces the reader (for a short time at least) to occupy the unaccustomed site of the ‘other’.

The material discussed here has been used across a wide age range from seven through to undergraduate level, and this paper will outline both the theoretical and pedagogical approaches employed.

All the texts to be considered ‘work’ by a process of defamiliarisation to a greater or lesser extent. Literary techniques of defamiliarisation seek to ‘make strange’ the reader’s experiences and awarenesses in such a way that it forces a reconsideration of the habitual, conventional and expected response which has become automatised by time (Shklovsky 1983).<sup>1</sup> The perceptions that

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<sup>1</sup> In *Art as Technique* Shklovsky argued: “Art exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects

defamiliarised texts produce are then newer and fresher than previous and allow original insight and understanding.

Defamiliarisation lends itself in particular to poetic discourse as a device, but it has been used extensively in prose. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) effectively employs defamiliarisation in its account of Utopia to function as a critique of 16<sup>th</sup> century European values and political structures. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759 the earliest experimental novel) makes extensive use of the device, as does Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which satirises the contemporary social and political order by having Gulliver explain to a horse (a superior being!) the customs and intrigues of an aristocratic class. By defamiliarising social codes Swift forces a fresh consideration of both their arbitrary and horrific nature. Interestingly, Tolstoy uses an equestrian narrator in his short story *Kholstomer* to lay bare the bizarre nature of the institution of private property. Modern examples of the device in prose include Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Golding's *The Inheritors*. (see explanatory note <sup>2</sup>)

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'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important."

<sup>2</sup> Faulkner provides us with a view of reality mediated by Benjy, a mentally retarded man, whose mindset has limited understanding of ordinary events (like playing golf). The reader has to translate Benjy's world view back into her own

Craig Raine's <sup>3</sup> poem A Martian sends a Postcard Home is an excellent example of a text that can profitably be used to initiate a discussion and develop awareness about 'otherness' and misrepresentation – both of which are key concepts in intercultural discourse. The poem's meaning only gradually emerges and is deliberately held back to create a strange and mysterious world which, in fact, turns out to be very familiar and mundane, but in this interpretative space the familiar loses its habitual and conventional status. The frustration and intrigue experienced as the reader struggles for comprehension is an important part of the poem's overall meaning, and is one that pupils thoroughly enjoy as their bafflement leads to gradual understanding.

The title should alert us to the fact that this poem is not about aliens (no life on Mars) and that the observations the poem contains will fall within the genre of the holiday postcard. Comments about the weather, cultural differences and social behaviours will be briefly and episodically stated with little opportunity to elaborate. A discussion about the title itself prior to the reading can draw out these possibilities and prepare the students for a

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and in so doing has normal reality defamiliarised. Golding's novel provides a world viewed from a Neanderthal perspective in which cause and effect are not understood and the differences between animate and inanimate are blurred.

<sup>3</sup> The poem is the title poem of his first collection and led to Raine being associated with a group of poets labelled 'martian poets' for their particular and excessive use of metaphor and defamiliarising techniques.

detective investigation. Alternatively, to increase the bewilderment, the poem can be read without initial comment. Very few students will 'get' the poem upon first reading and it is probably better to arrange students in pairs or small groups to talk through their reactions and chart their halting progress towards understanding.

The poem contains two kinds of observations: ones about the weather (mist and rain) which are simply alternative ways of seeing and experiencing, and descriptions of objects and phenomena that are presented as riddles or conundrums for the reader to decipher. Time itself is also offered as an alternative way of understanding, and here humans are seen to constrict and enclose Time in ways the Martian cannot understand. The relative, arbitrary and subjective nature of time is one that interests students as well philosophers, post-modernists and advanced physicists!

Caxtons turn out to be books – not aeroplanes or birds, as an initial reading would suggest (the clue is the name of the earliest English printer – it could have been Gutenberg!). Their wings are pages, their treasured nature relates to high status books, and they can produce both tears and laughter in readers.

Model T is an intriguing object, which is in fact a car (the clue is Model T Ford, the first car to be produced on an assembly line). In his description the Martian reveals a fundamental error (?) about the nature of motion. His understanding

of the car which allows the world to move is quite close to the common experience of being seated in a stationary train that appears to move when another one moves out, and it is only by fixing your eyes on a object through the window can you determine whether you are moving or not. As with time, motion is also a relative concept and the Martian forces us to reconsider our habitual, but inaccurate, sense of motion.

The haunted apparatus often proves the hardest object to identify because there are no direct clues to its nature. It is difficult to move away from the belief that it is a child, but when the realisation dawns that it is a telephone the enigmatic references all make sudden sense.

Most children have little difficulty in identifying the punishment room as a toilet or recognising the nocturnal behaviour of humans!

Behind this intriguing and amusing poem lies some very profound and serious issues of understanding, recognition and meaning that can be explored in general terms as well as intercultural ones.

At a more obvious and simple level Tony Ross's *Dr Xargle*<sup>4</sup> picture books perform the same kind of function, they are more accessible to younger children but can be used with much older students. Dr Xargle is an alien teacher who, complete with visual aids, instructs his class on

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<sup>4</sup> *Dr Xargle's Book of Earthlets*  
*Dr Xargle's Book of Earthounds*  
*Dr Xargle's Book of Earthweather*

various features of earth life. Unfortunately, he/it fails to get it totally right, and the gap between his misperceptions and our reality create a humorous tension which make the books so appealing. For example, he believes that earth babies need powdering and wrapping in triangular material to prevent them from exploding.

Edwin Morgan <sup>5</sup> is a contemporary poet who has written a range of poems about space and space travel. His poem First Men on Mercury extends the range of defamiliarisation into issues that bear on linguistic and post-colonial perspectives. As with Raine's Martian it is abundantly clear that this is not a poem about Mercury (totally inhospitable environment!) but about the role of language in the colonial enterprise and cultural exchange. It employs a post-colonial discourse in that it uses the language of the colonisers as a weapon used by the colonised to assert both their independence and rejection of colonial values. Younger pupils enjoy the game as the protagonists begin to employ, and finally absorb, each other's language, whilst older students can explore the poem against a wider framework of contemporary issues both political and linguistic.

Maurice Sendak's classic picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* can also be read with an eye to post-colonial interpretations, and this text can be read alongside The First Men on Mercury to supplement the complex issues raised.

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<sup>5</sup> Edwin Morgan's work is often experimental in nature.

The texts discussed, and others included in the Reading Suggestions chapter, can be fruitfully used as starting points for a more specific examination of stereotyping, misrepresentation, demonisation, otherness, subjectivity, marginalisation and cultural differences.

# The Use of Websites in Intercultural Education

Mette Vedelsby

The Internet or the World Wide Web is a network of innumerable connected computers from all over the World, which is changing all the time. The Internet may be considered one vast cultural stage on which players from all over the world perform. For those who work with the study of i.e. intercultural matters, the themes are presented in all sorts of ways on many websites.

1.

The Internet may be looked upon as a cultural phenomenon and be made the object of analysis. In this connection one could investigate the Internet Culture by i.e. looking at how people are addressing each other when using e-mails and/or electronic conferences compared to oral or written communication. Computer language turns out to be a hybrid between written and very informal written/spoken language. The gambits of ordinary speech are not there, but still needed. Communicating via the Internet needs discipline. When a sender sends inputs to an electronic conference or sends an e-mail s/he needs to indicate whom the sender is and to whom the message is

addressed.

The media is democratic in essence. Everybody has the floor. Whether what is written, is read is another matter.

To make students aware of Internet Culture you could ask them questions as:

What is Internet culture?

What kinds of community are established/thrive on Internet?

How does that influence our perception of reality?

Does it mean anything that the Internet is a cultural space, consisting of signs or in other words, is spirit without body and material frames?

2.

The Internet may also be looked upon and may be used as an enormous library, from which one can fetch intercultural materials, search in, and read intercultural publications and follow debates about intercultural matters.

The Internet is a fantastic resource of working material and information for students and teachers.

But we have to be very careful using the material from the Internet. Sometimes the information is very superficial. To find out about the quality of a website it is first of all a good idea to try to identify the sender, because everybody can

publish on the Internet.

### Criteria for a good website are

You can identify the sender

You can identify the sources for the materials on the site

The site is updated regularly

The spellings on the site is correct

There are not too many dead links

You can find information about goals/aims, audience and investigate if the site is reaching its goals.

The Internet is a very important tool in courses and projects in Intercultural Education because it gives a possibility to get access to intercultural work from a variety of sources from several geographical origins and from various political approaches.

In the Comenius course, “Intercultural Education: Fiction and Cultural Identity” there was a workshop called ‘Internet.Intercult’, through which participants (teacher trainers and educators) were invited to browse through some resources on intercultural education previously collected.

The aims of the workshop were:

(a) How to use the Internet to widen horizons about Intercultural Education, specifically about Children’s Fiction and the teaching of culture

(b) The Internet as a resource of materials and information

(c) The cultural Identity of the website provider

(d) Criteria for a good website

After a short introduction, the participants were working in pairs with different websites, and were given the following guiding questions:

Sender/receiver. Who is the target group of the web site? Does the site mention a specific address? Can the sender be identified? Can you identify the culture of the sender in the website?

Quality. Reflect on how to assess the quality of a website.

Tendencies. What are the tendencies of the website? Does it want to enlighten, arouse interest, inform or discuss?

Can the website be used in a teaching situation? Discuss.

Can the website be used in your preparations for your daily work? And is it a good idea? Discuss.

Add questions of your own, too.

Afterwards the groups presented their findings using the computer and the projector. The presentations were followed by discussions.

## Some Internet Pages

Below you will find a list of Internet sites that were used during the course.

Links:

HYPERLINK

<http://www.Hascoll.dk/Intercultural/Index.htm>

<http://www.Hascoll.dk/Intercultural/Index.htm>

Homepage for Intercultural Comenius courses

HYPERLINK

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/special/kay/childlit.html>

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/special/kay/childlit.html>

About gender and culture in picture books and other multicultural issues connected to books for children

HYPERLINK

<http://www.armory.com/~web/fambooks.html>

<http://www.armory.com/~web/fambooks.html>

Annotated bibliography of multiracial families in children's books

HYPERLINK

"<http://www.envirowatch.org/ShkRlty.htm>"

<http://www.envirowatch.org/ShkRlty.htm>

Photos of children's drawings showing the same motives as the photos: Fishermen making the best of their "by catch", sharks. The pictures show the whole process: The catching, the drying, the cutting and making of soup, etc. The process and the product

HYPERLINK "<http://tlc.ai.org/booklist.htm>"

<http://tlc.ai.org/booklist.htm>

#TOP

teaching units on children's literature

HYPERLINK "<http://voices.cla.umn.edu>"

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu>

- Voices from the Gap.

A collection of pages on North American women writers and minority writers with list of related sites

HYPERLINK "<http://vos.ucsb.edu/shuttle/eng-cont.html>"

<http://vos.ucsb.edu/shuttle/eng-cont.html>

#british

multicultural U.S. fiction web with concepts, definitions, history, reading narrative, list of related websites

HYPERLINK

"<http://www.creativeconnections.org/>"

<http://www.creativeconnections.org/>

International exchange programme for art classes.

Features "Letters from Children Around the world", "Artlink programme" and exhibitions of children's art pictures.

HYPERLINK <http://www.thegateway.org/>

<http://www.thegateway.org/>

Resources of educational materials. Search by keyword

HYPERLINK

"<http://ladb.unm.edu/retanet/plans/soc/index.html#/>

Imigration"

<http://ladb.unm.edu/retanet/plans/soc/index.html#/>

migration

Lesson plans on immigration, migration, borders, identity from the RETANET - Latin America, Resources for Teaching About the Americas

HYPERLINK

"<http://www.ericeece.org/pubs/books/multicul/trepptke.html>"

<http://www.ericeece.org/pubs/books/multicul/trepptke.html>

Multicultural approaches in German education. Description of a project, which focuses on the needs of immigrant Turkish families. The men originally came to work in the coal and steel mines, but now these have closed. Over time, the project has developed a wide variety of activities, which e.g. involve parents in their children's education and provide parent education as well

HYPERLINK

<http://cela.albany.edu/paths/miller.html>

<http://cela.albany.edu/paths/miller.html>

An ethnographic study examining the consequences of interdisciplinary efforts involving literature and history. This was an effort to develop pluralistic understanding with students. 60 pages! There is also a long list of relevant reading, e.g. one called "Theory, Identity and Practice: A Study of Two High School English Teachers' Literature Instruction".

HYPERLINK

"[http://www.well.com/user/bbear/myth\\_met.html](http://www.well.com/user/bbear/myth_met.html)"

[http://www.well.com/user/bbear/myth\\_met.html](http://www.well.com/user/bbear/myth_met.html)

Psychology. About Myth, Metaphor and Magic. Right and left brain thinking, the uses of ambiguity,

creating metaphors, also for therapeutic uses.

HYPERLINK

"[http://www.pta.org/programs/edulibr/child\\_hatred\\_prejudice.htm](http://www.pta.org/programs/edulibr/child_hatred_prejudice.htm)"

[http://www.pta.org/programs/edulibr/child\\_hatred\\_prejudice.htm](http://www.pta.org/programs/edulibr/child_hatred_prejudice.htm)

Article by by Caryl M. Stern-LaRosa entitled :  
"Talking to your children about hatred and prejudice"

The article is about how to teach children about their own culture as well as those around them.

HYPERLINK

"[http://www.uua.org/re/reach/parenting/children\\_resist\\_bias.html](http://www.uua.org/re/reach/parenting/children_resist_bias.html)"

[http://www.uua.org/re/reach/parenting/children\\_resist\\_bias.html](http://www.uua.org/re/reach/parenting/children_resist_bias.html)

Article Louise Derman-Sparks et al entitled  
"Teaching Young children to resist Bias: What parents can do"

HYPERLINK

"<http://www.curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/activityarch.html>"

<http://www.curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/activityarch.html>

Multicultural awareness activities and clarification of concepts

## Post course task activities

### Launching...

#### Margarida Morgado

While on the intensive courses on 'Fiction and Cultural Identity', both in 2000 in Castelo Branco, Portugal, and in 2001, in Scarborough, UK, participants were asked to organise themselves in groups and to define themes, targets and strategies to implement intercultural education actions in their classes.

Three perspectives were opened up for the post-course task activity:

- (1) to create a lesson plan;
- (2) to readdress texts studied at school;
- (3) to implement an intercultural perspective in a school or subject area.

#### Creating a lesson plan

A sample of projects on intercultural education, preferably using fiction, were put together and distributed among participants, and activities were prepared, the aim of which was to start participants thinking on pedagogical approaches.

Participants were asked to look at the projects available and to note down what they thought most interesting in terms of pedagogical approaches.

Next, participants were encouraged to form groups and define a classroom situation to which to apply a lesson plan on intercultural education using fiction. Group members were further asked to draw a European reading list that might be useful for the intercultural situation defined.

### Readdressing school texts

Departing from Micheline Rey's statement (in 'Training Teachers in Intercultural education? The Work of the Council of Europe (1977-1983), Strasbourg) that

an intercultural approach to education does not mean that current educational practices should be replaced by new ones, or that another subject should be created

participants were invited to look at the texts studied in their own school systems and to analyse one or more in order to produce approaches that might contribute to enhance:

- equal opportunities;
- solidarity;
- intercultural development;
- the reassessment of criteria of socio- and ethnocentric evaluation;
- mutual recognition of cultures;
- legitimisation of migrant, immigrant or minority cultures

## Implementing an intercultural perspective in school/ subject area

Largely addressed to school managers or subject leaders, participants were asked to discuss and design approaches to one of these issues:

- the symbolic use of migrants' mother tongue texts as a basis for them to build up a personal and social identity;
- offering migrants' minority languages as foreign languages in the normal timetables;
- libraries and audiovisual documentation centres – prepared to cover a wide range of cultures;
- artistic exhibitions across cultures;
- motivate staff to work in intercultural teams.

## Some examples of team work

Most projects developed during the course concerned the development of pedagogical strategies to promote intercultural education. Most were built on fictional texts, picture books, young adult novels or newspaper material from several European countries.

One international group projected a selection and cross-presentation of pupils' favourite picture books, followed by an exchange of comments, photos, videos and of creative writing sessions in the context of the teaching of the languages involved.

Another international group of primary teachers

concentrated on discovering the small imaginary creatures of children's stories in the various cultures involved in order to develop cross-cultural understanding.

A third group chose adverts (commercials on TV and advertising in magazines and newspapers) as their topic for 12 to 17-year-old students to explore similarities and differences and to use English as a foreign language as well as the several national languages involved.

## Some Reading Suggestions Fiction Books

These are some reading suggestions of fictions, from several nationalities, for young and older students that the tutors of the course “Fiction and Cultural Identity” thought adequate for the theme and that evolved from contacts with all the participants on the course.

### Picture books

(Difference and Similarities, Ethnicity, Racism)

Ungerer, Tomi, *Otto, autobiographie d'un ours en peluche*

Andersen, Hans Christian, illustrated by Georges Lemoine, *La petite marchande d'allumettes* (on the Sarajevo siege)

Browne, Anthony, (1999) *Voices in the Park*. Picture Corgi Books.

Denti, Roberto and Maria Nazario (1996) *La Moglie Antilope e la Moglie Foca*. Africa '70. (stories told from the point of view of a

Nigerian boy; cultural differences)

Eco, Humberto and Eugenio Carmi (1988) *I tre Cosmonauti*. Grupo Editoriale Fabbri. (difference and universality)

Harranth, Wolf and Barbara Resch (1971) *Ein Elefant mit rosaroten Ohren*. Jungbrunnen (difference and acceptance for very small children)

Letria, José Jorge e João Fazenda, (2000) *Olá Brasil!* Lisboa: Terramar.

Lobe, Mira and Susi Weigel (1972) *Das kleine Ich bin ich*. Jungbrunnen (identity)

McKee, David (1992) *Elmer*. Puffin. (difference and similarity/identity)

Sendak, Maurice (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*. Harper & Row. (the colonial situation)

Ulitzka, Irene (1993) *Das Land der Ecken*. Picus (tolerance of the foreign)

Welsh, Renate and Ulrich Scwecke (1989) *Stefan*. Jungbrunnen (realistic portrayal of the life of handicapped boy).

Zucconi, Vittorio (1993) *Stranieri Come Noi*. Einaudi/Scuola (cultural differences)

## Books for older students

Deary, Terry and Martin Brown (1994) *The Vicious Vikings*. Scholastic. (historical approach; stereotyping)

Deary, Terry and Martin Brown (1994) *The Rotten Romans*. Scholastic. (historical approach; stereotyping)

Gosciny and Uderzo's *Asterix in Corsica*. (or several other Asterix books, translated from the French into several languages) throws a funny look on Italians (or minorities in Italy). It is a very interesting book from which to try and distinguish forms of identity in Europe and to realize that they are always produced from a specific cultural and national context. It is also very interesting because it gives a picture of Europe as national AND regional ways of being juxtaposing, contradicting each other, overlapping.

Hines, Barry (1968) *A Kestrel for a Knave*. Penguin 1969. About a socially deprived boy, mal adjusted at school, who learns to care

Holm, Anne (1963) *I am David*. Methuen (English translation from the Danish). (European identity vs national identity, crossing Europe; Anne Holm's *I*

*am David* is a striking story of a boy who crosses Europe and reaches Denmark. Stereotypes are there in his brief descriptions of people and places (seen as without prejudice, since David knows very little of wordly ways).

Kipling, Rudyard (1906) *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Penguin 1994. (historical approach; stereotyping; nationalism). Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (early twentieth century) on the 'glorious' British, the notion of the British as a combination of people and of British superiority. There are also some subtler notions to be explored, between genders (gender and nationality), spaces, etc. Other aspects to explore: political and cultural heritages defended by children's books. Communities undergoing hybridization, internal prejudices, forced assimilation. How exclusion and inclusion work in the text. This text allows us to explore the notion that nationalities are produced historically, in literature).

Richter, Hans Peter (1974) *Damals war es Friedrich*. Deutscher Tachenbuch Verlag, 1999. (The similar lives of two boys are shattered during Hitler's regime by the constitution of difference).

Secretariado Entreculturas, *No Arquipélago das Maravilhas*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação (historical approach and information; acceptance of differences; de-centering)

- Secretariado Entreculturas, *Histórias de Longe e de Perto*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação (historical approach)
- Secretariado Entreculturas, *Entre Dois Mundos*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação (the contact of different cultures; cultural shock)
- Secretariado Entreculturas, *Vamos Conhecer Cabo Verde*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação. (historical approach to Cabo Verde)
- Secretariado Entreculturas, *Os Negros no Coração do Império*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação (historical approach, racism)
- Smith, Rukshana. 1980. *Sumitra's Story*. Dell Publishing. (deals with racial prejudice in Britain, but also with adaptation of Muslim girls to western urban ways of life and stresses differences between Pakistan and Britain. Themes: forced assimilation; hybridization. Dividing lines of identity; negotiations of identity and difference in a phase of globalisation).
- Tournier, Michel. 19. *Vendredi ou La Vie Sauvage*. Paris: (to be read as a post-colonial re-writing of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*)



# Setting Up a Post-Course E-mail Discussion Group

## A Tricky Task but Is It Worth It?

Rod Macadam

As a member of a Comenius Group producing international courses and as a perceived “computer expert”, it fell to me to organise electronic-mailing discussion groups as a follow-up activity which would seek to continue and maintain the group dynamics and enthusiasm engendered by the course and to allow participants and course organisers to benefit from the shared experiences, positive and negative, resulting from the activities of the course.

The purpose of this article is to report on how this can be best achieved, to alert you to some of the pitfalls and difficulties which can arise and hopefully promote some e-mail discussion which will better inform all of us to the potential of the electronic mailing medium among educationalists.

It might be helpful for this article to inform you of the content of the courses we were delivering. The two parallel courses were “Using the Moslem Experience as a Paradigm” and “Fiction and Cultural Identity”.

As it is presently perceived and accepted by all of us - electronic mailing is the Internet equivalent of letters, sometimes referred to as “snail-mail”, and/or faxes. It has the advantage of

being both quicker, usually only a matter of minutes, and cheaper, usually the cost of a local telephone call which can be free in some instances, and its versatility allows text documents, sound, programs and graphics to be incorporated into the e-mail being sent. It also removes the problem of inappropriately contacting/disturbing people in other time zones or trying to make contact with a person whose telephone line is consistently busy. On the negative side the efficiency of the e-mailing medium depends on the person being contacted maintaining a fairly regular regime of reading and responding to e-mails. This problem also applies to traditional postal mail.

I have recently been involved in a Research Project, which entailed using the Internet to locate organisations involved in the subject matter of my research and then contacting them either by linked e-mail addresses on their Web sites or by using e-mail addresses supplied by published literature. I have to confess that the responses, which resulted from this means of electronic contacting were extremely disappointing. I made over 500 requests for further information and more than half of these resulted in a nil return including second and third requests. My experience was that the telephone contact proved more beneficial as far as positive responses to my queries were concerned.

The lesson to be drawn from the above information is that to ensure a lively and profitable discussion group participation and contribution the messages have to be interesting and response

provoking. The course organisers need to be aware of this and pro-active in the early stages of the group formation. It can be a good idea to attach a post-course task, which will initiate an exchange of information. It is also fairly vital to have the group formed as soon as a delay in getting things going can result in negative responses.

Gathering the e-mail addresses accurately is another important element when creating a discussion group. The most accurate way to do this is to use the e-mail facility to reply and this automatically copies the address correctly. This can be problematical when you are trying to collect and collate up to 20 addresses.

I offer the following method. During the course the e-mail address of the discussion group organiser should be handed to each participant with a typed instruction that if they wish to be a member of the group they must send an e-mail to the organiser and embody in the text a copy of their e-mail address. This allows the organiser to acknowledge the response using the Reply button but also to have a text address which can be highlighted. When all the responses have been gathered a master address list should be sent to each participant with the instruction that this should be copied into their Send window and given a name and placed in their e-mail address book for future usage.

The address list should contain the names separated by a ; like this anyone@Yahoo.com;

myname@BTInternet.com;  
yourname@Hotmail.com and so  
on.

The welcoming letter would read something  
like this -

Dear Colleague,

I am now able to offer you the complete list of  
addresses for the discussion group and here it is –  
anyname@Yahoo.com;  
myname@BTInternet.com;  
yourname@Hotmail.com and so  
on

Please highlight the list and save in your address  
book with a suitable group name and use this to  
communicate with other group members.

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